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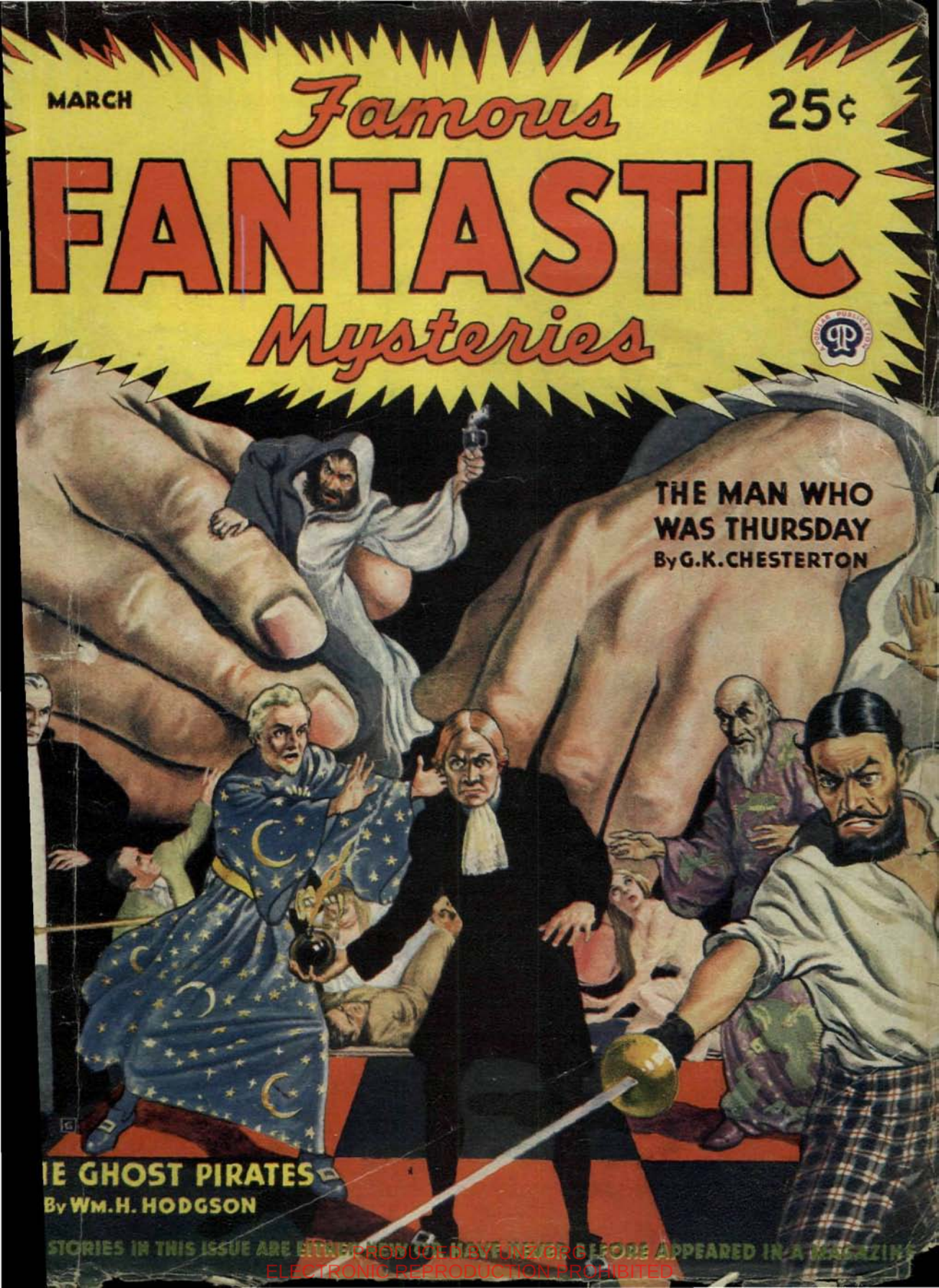

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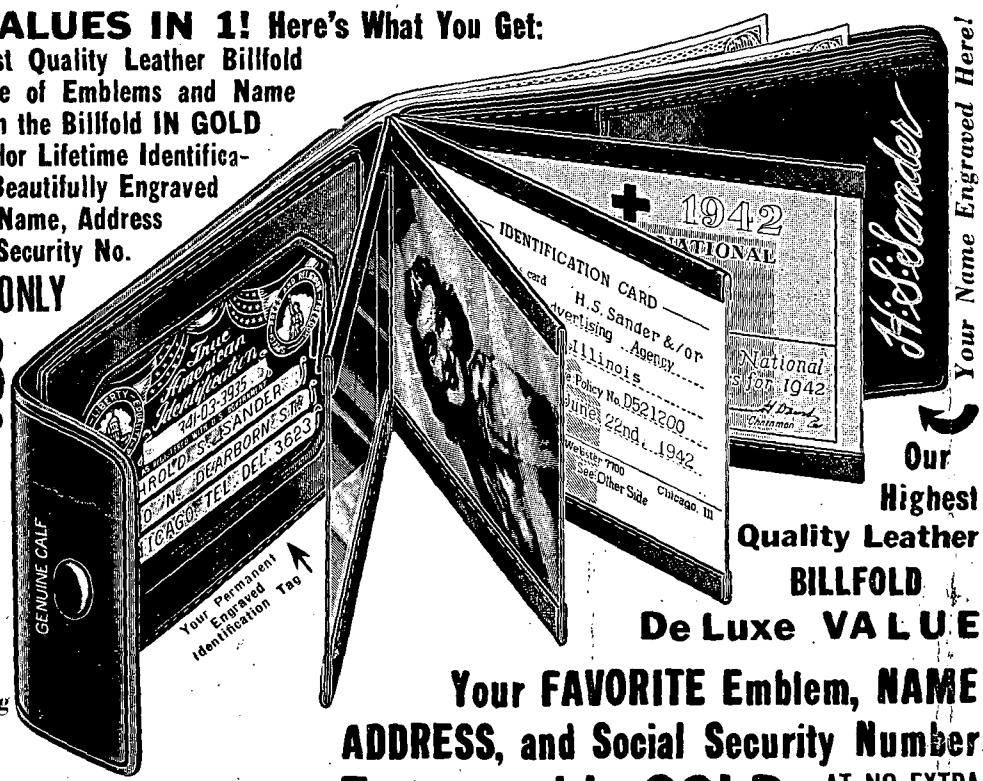

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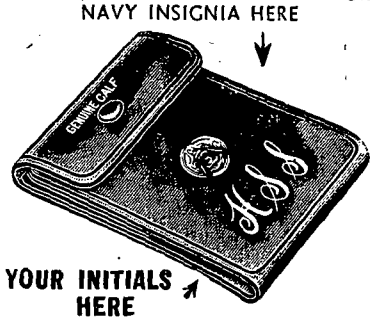

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VOL. V MARCH, 1944 No. 6

Full Book-Length Novels

The Man Who Was Thursday (A Nightmare) G. K. Chesterton 8

Deliberately he placed himself in a terrorists' grim game, to be the sport of the invisible, frightful master mind he knew as "Sunday." Could he find out the secret of the network of destruction in which both Law and Anarchy were pawns—and of the Seven Men whose hobby was Death?

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The Ghost Pirates William Hope Hodgson 88

"Strange as the glimmer of the ghastly light
That shines from some vast crest of wave at night."

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Features

The Readers' Viewpoint 6

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A. Merritt—A Tribute 86

The Second Finlay Portfolio 95

Cover and illustrations by Lawrence

All the stories in this publication are either new or have never appeared in a magazine.

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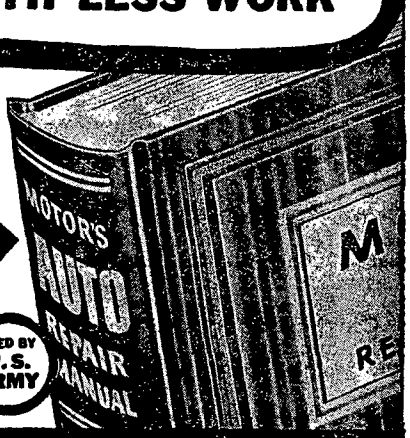

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The Readers' Viewpoint

Address comments to the Letter Editor, Famous Fantastic Mysteries, All-Fiction Field, Inc., 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York.

A READER WRITES OF THE GREAT A. MERRITT

Dear Editor:

The death of A. Merritt is a blow to the whole field of Fantasy. There has never been an author so capable as he was of telling you what he wanted to, and making you believe it. His "poetic prose," the best description of his writing, has been unsurpassed.

His realness of presentation, such that he simply states the facts of a seemingly incredible monster, and then spins a tale about it that definitely makes you believe that such a thing really exists, is just about the finest part of the stories that the Wizard of Fantasy has written.

Congratulations on F.F.M.'s December issue! Now, and I am happy to say it, you are "in the groove." The entire latest ish was such a marked improvement over those that have gone before it that I almost find it difficult to express myself. So sit back, put the result of ration coupon number eighteen and whatever is within, on the top of your desk, and prepare to receive praise.

J. Leslie Mitchell wrote a very adultish story that succeeded in every sense of the word. Not only was the characterization great—but the story had real scope, too—and, I am gratified to say, without becoming gory thud and blunder. The scenes were all varied, all harmonious to the theme, and all were beautiful. "Three Go Back" is already on my list of classics. And, steadily, my estimation of it mounts. I would say that it is included among the ten fantasy classics of all times—which is saying something. "The Moon Pool" is definitely one of these ten, as is Binder's immortal "Vassals of the Master World." "Ark of Fire" (which you had the honor of printing, thanks to RW) creeps toward the ten top tales, but, at the last moment is always thrust back. It may make it yet, however.

I am very glad to see that your selections have been, without exception, nothing of the horrible blood and thunder variety. I may be wrong, but "The Man Who Was Thursday" doesn't sound like fantasy to me. However, I shall wait until I actually see it.

Sorry to see the exit of Finlay (however, I wish him all the success in the world in his new capacity—working for Uncle Sam). Lawrence, though, fills the gap excellently, and, even when the war reaches an end Lawrence should be a permanent member of your staff. By that time, too, we can hope for the return of *Super Science* and *Astonishing*, and a golden age of fatascience-fiction.

Bok is doing admirable work, too. Incidentally, thanx for printing "The Mask," as I requested. It was enjoyed for a second time by y'rs truly. Hodgson's "Derelict" is a nice short—pretty fine, in fact. The other story, "King of the Gray Spaces" was a bit childish (obviously) but wasn't at all bad. 'Twas pretty good, in fact. Bradbury is a fella to watch. Remember in *Super Science*, a long time back, his startling success written in collaboration with Hasse, "Pendulum"?

I guess that that's about all for this time. Here's to continued success throughout the issues to come.

MILT LESSER,
The Happy Genius.

2302 AVENUE O,
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CHESTERTON WONDERFUL CHOICE

My mother has just written me that the second Finlay album has reached my home address, and I would like to thank you—in a kind of second manner—for it. I'm sure it is as lovely as the first.

The new policy of F.F.M. is a good one except, naturally, for the infrequent dates of publication. Lawrence is good enough and very fine when he doesn't attempt to mimic Finlay. Bok is very good. You might try getting H. S. DeLay and especially Hugh Rankin to do some of your illustrations. They would certainly fit the mood of the short stories. You might also consider the change of main title so often requested by readers.

Chesterton's "The Man Who Was Thursday" is a wonderful choice, but "Three Go Back" looks rather worn-out and "The Iron Star," although I have finished only half, does not seem very different from other things. Is there no way for you to include some of Lovecraft's and Merritt's work? They should not be excluded from Fantasy's pages.

Your greatest drawing card is "The King in Yellow" series, but it is a wise policy to draw them out over a period of time.

C. HIDLEY.

SOMEWHERE IN
THE SERVICE.

WRITTEN AUGUST 23RD

I just read with regret of A. Merritt's death. In fact it came as all the more of a shock to me since I was in at your office on Thursday afternoon (Aug. 19th) to check on the status of my subscription to *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* and to inquire if there was any possibility of your publishing "The Ship of Ishtar." Then I went over to Merritt's and had a nice

(Continued on page 131)

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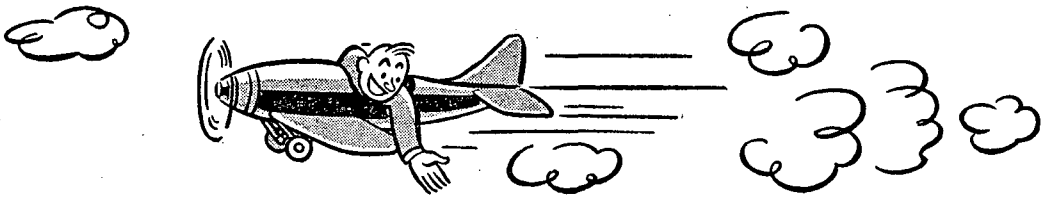

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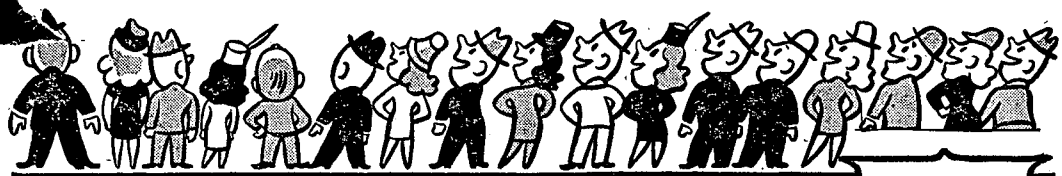

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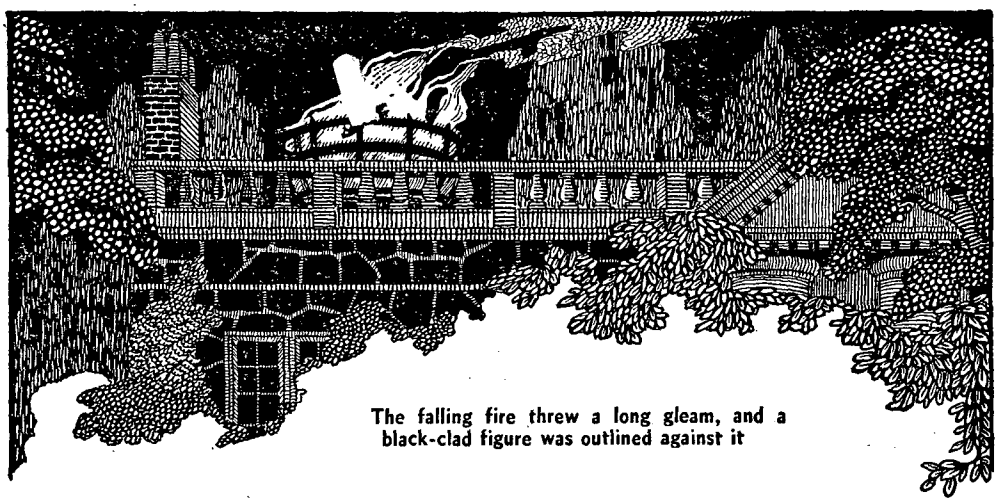

The falling fire threw a long gleam, and a black-clad figure was outlined against it

The Man Who Was Thursday

A NIGHTMARE

By G. K. Chesterton

Deliberately he placed himself in a terrorists' grim game, to be the sport of the invisible, frightful mastermind he knew as "Sunday." Could he find out the secret of the network of destruction in which both Law and Anarchy were pawns—and of the Seven Men whose hobby was Death?

CHAPTER I

THE TWO POETS OF SAFFRON PARK

THE suburb of Saffron Park lay on the sunset side of London, as red and ragged as a cloud of sunset. It was built of a bright brick throughout; its skyline was fantastic, and even its ground plan was wild. It had been the outburst of a speculative builder, faintly tinged with art, who called its architecture sometimes Elizabethan and sometimes Queen Anne, apparently under the impression that the two sovereigns were identical. It was described with some justice as an artistic colony, though it never in any definable way produced any art. But although its pretensions to be an intellectual centre were a little vague, its pretensions to be a pleasant place were quite indisputable. The stranger who looked for the first time at the quaint red houses could only think how very oddly shaped the people must be to fit in to them. Nor when he met the

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people was he disappointed in this respect. The place was not only pleasant, but perfect, if once he could regard it not as a deception but rather as a dream. Even if the people were not "artists," the whole was nevertheless artistic. That young man with the long, auburn hair and the impudent face—that young man was not really a poet; but surely he was a poem. That old gentleman with the wild, white beard and the wild, white hat —that venerable humbug was not really a philosopher; but at least he was the cause of philosophy in others. That scientific gentleman with the bald, egg-like head and the bare, bird-like neck had no real right to the airs of science that he assumed. He had not discovered anything new in biology; but what biological creature could he have discovered more singular than himself? Thus, and thus only, the whole place had properly to be regarded; it had to be considered not so much as a workshop for artists, but as a frail but finished work of art. A man who stepped into its social atmosphere felt as if he had stepped into a written comedy.

More especially this attractive unreality fell upon it about nightfall, when the extravagant roofs were dark against the afterglow and the whole insane village seemed as separate as a drifting cloud. This again was more strongly true of the many nights of local festivity, when the little gardens were often illuminated, and the big Chinese lanterns glowed in the dwarfish trees like some fierce and monstrous fruit. And this was strongest of all on one particular evening, still vaguely remembered in the locality, of which the auburn-haired poet was the hero. It was not by any means the only evening of which he was the hero. On many nights those passing by his little back garden might hear his high, didactic voice laying down the law to men and particularly to women. The attitude of women in such cases was indeed one of the paradoxes of the place. Most of the women were of the kind vaguely called emancipated, and professed some protest against male supremacy. Yet these new women would always pay to a man the extravagant compliment which no ordinary women ever pays to him, that of listening while he is talking. And Mr. Lucian Gregory, the red-haired poet, was really (in some sense) a man worth listening to, even if one only laughed at the end of it. He put the old cant of the lawlessness of art and the art of lawlessness with a certain impudent freshness which gave at least a momentary pleasure. He was helped in some degree by the arresting oddity of his appearance, which he worked, as the phrase goes, for all it was worth. His dark red hair parted in the middle was literally like a woman's, and curved into the slow curls of a virgin in a pre-Raphaelite picture. From within this almost saintly oval, however, his face projected suddenly broad and brutal, the chin carried forward with a look of cockney contempt. This combination at once tickled and terrified the nerves of a neurotic population. He seemed like a walking blasphemy, a blend of the angel and the ape.

THIS particular evening, if it is remembered for nothing else, will be remembered in that place for its strange sunset. It looked like the end of the world. All the heaven seemed covered with a quite vivid and palpable plumage; you could only say that the sky was full of feathers, and of feathers that almost brushed the face. Across the great part of the dome they were grey, with the strangest tints of violet and mauve and an unnatural pink or pale green; but towards the west the whole grew past description, transparent and passionate, and the last red-hot plumes of it covered up the sun like something too good to be seen. The whole was so close about the earth, as to express nothing but a violent secrecy. The very empyrean seemed to be a secret. It expressed that splendid smallness which is the soul of local patriotism. The very sky seemed small.

I say that there are some inhabitants who may remember the evening if only by that oppressive sky. There are others who may remember it because it marked the first appearance in the place of the second poet of Saffron Park. For a long time the red-haired revolutionary had reigned without a rival; it was upon the night of the sunset that his solitude suddenly ended. The new poet, who introduced himself by the name of Gabriel Syme, was a very mild-looking mortal, with a fair, pointed beard and faint, yellow hair. But an impression grew that he was less meek than he looked. He signalised his entrance by differing with the established poet, Gregory, upon the whole nature of poetry. He said that he (Syme) was a poet of law, a poet of

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order; nay, he said he was a poet of respectability. So all the Saffron Parkers looked at him as if he had that moment fallen out of that impossible sky.

In fact, Mr. Lucian Gregory, the anarchic poet, connected the two events.

"It may well be," he said, in his sudden lyrical manner, "it may well be on such a night of clouds and cruel colours that there is brought forth upon the earth such a portent as a respectable poet. You say you are a poet of law; I say you are a contradiction in terms. I only wonder there were not comets and earthquakes on the night you appeared in this garden."

The man with the meek blue eyes and the pale, pointed beard endured these thunders with a certain submissive solemnity. The third party of the group, Gregory's sister Rosamond, who had her brother's braids of red hair, but a kindlier face underneath them, laughed with such mixture of admiration and disapproval as she gave commonly to the family oracle.

Gregory resumed in high oratorical good-humour.

"An artist is identical with an anarchist," he cried. "You might transpose the words anywhere. An anarchist is an artist. The man who throws a bomb is an artist, because he prefers a great moment to everything. He sees how much more valuable is one burst of blazing light, one peal of perfect thunder, than the mere common bodies of a few shapeless policemen. An artist disregards all governments, abolishes all conventions. The poet delights in disorder only. If it were not so, the most poetical thing in the world would be the Underground Railway."

"So it is," said Mr. Syme.

"Nonsense!" said Gregory, who was very rational when any one else attempted paradox. "Why do all the clerks and navvies in the railway trains look so sad and tired, so very sad and tired? I will tell you. It is because they know that the train is going right. It is because they know that whatever place they have taken a ticket for that place they will reach. It is because after they have passed Sloane Square they know that the next station must be Victoria, and nothing but Victoria. Oh, their wild rapture! Oh, their eyes like stars and their souls again in Eden, if the next station were unaccountably Baker Street!"

"It is you who are unpoetical," replied the poet Syme. "If what you say of clerks is true, they can only be as prosaic as your poetry. The rare, strange thing is to hit the mark; the gross, obvious thing is to miss it. We feel it is epical when man with one wild arrow strikes a distant bird. Is it not also epical when man with one wild engine strikes a distant station? Chaos is dull; because in chaos the train might indeed go anywhere, to Baker Street or to Bagdad. But man is a magician, and his whole magic is in this, that he does say Victoria, and lo! it is Victoria. No, take your books of mere poetry and prose; let me read a time table, with tears of pride. Take your Byron, who commemorates the defeats of man; give me Bradshaw, who commemorates his victories. Give me Bradshaw, I say!"

"Must you go?" inquired Gregory sarcastically.

"I tell you," went on Syme with passion, "that every time a train comes in I feel that it has broken past batteries of besiegers, and that man has won a battle against chaos. You say contemptuously that when one has left Sloane Square one must come to Victoria. I say that one might do a thousand things instead, and that whenever I really come that I have the sense of hair-breadth escape. And when I hear the guard shout out the word 'Victoria,' it is not an unmeaning word. It is to me the cry of a herald announcing conquest. It is to me indeed 'Victoria;' it is the victory of Adam."

GREGORY wagged his heavy, red head with a slow and sad smile.

"And even then," he said, "we poets always ask the question, 'And what is Victoria now that you have got there?' You think Victoria is like the New Jerusalem. We know that the New Jerusalem will only be like Victoria. Yes, the poet will be discontented even in the streets of heaven. The poet is always in revolt."

"There again," said Syme irritably, "what is there poetical about being in revolt? You might as well say that it is poetical to be seasick. Being sick is a revolt. Both being sick and being rebellious may be the wholesome thing on certain desperate occasions; but I'm hanged if I can see why they are poetical. Revolt in the abstract is—revolting. It's mere vomiting."

The girl winced at the unpleasant word, but Syme was too hot to heed her.

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"It is things going right," he cried, "that is poetical! Our digestions, for instance, going sacredly and silently right, that is the foundation of all poetry. Yes, the most poetical thing, more poetical than the flowers, more poetical than the stars—the most poetical thing in the world is not being sick."

"Really," said Gregory, superciliously, "the examples you choose—"

"I beg your pardon," said Syme grimly, "I forgot we had abolished all conventions."

For the first time a red patch appeared on Gregory's forehead.

"You don't expect me," he said, "to revolutionise society on this lawn?"

Syme looked straight into his eyes and smiled sweetly.

"No, I don't," he said; "but I suppose that if you were serious about your anarchism, that is exactly what you would do."

Gregory's big bull's eyes blinked suddenly like those of any angry lion, and one could almost fancy that his red mane rose.

"Don't you think, then," he said in a dangerous voice, "that I am serious about my anarchism?"

"I beg your pardon?" said Syme, a little startled.

"Am I not serious about my anarchism?" cried Gregory, with knotted fists.

"My dear fellow!" said Syme, and strolled away.

With surprise, but with a curious pleasure, he found Rosamond Gregory still in his company.

"Mr. Syme," she said, "do the people who talk like you and my brother often mean what they say? Do you mean what you say now?"

Syme smiled.

"Do you?" he asked.

"What do you mean?" asked the girl, with grave eyes.

"My dear Miss Gregory," said Syme gently, "there are many kinds of sincerity and insincerity. When you say 'thank you' for the salt, do you mean what you say? No. When you say 'the world is round,' do you mean what you say? No. It is true, but you don't mean it. Now, sometimes a man like your brother really finds a thing he does mean. It may be only a half-truth, quarter-truth, tenth-truth; but then he says more than he means—from sheer force of meaning it."

She was looking at him from under level brows; her face was grave and open, and there had fallen upon it the shadow of that unreasoning responsibility which is at the bottom of the most frivolous woman, the maternal watch which is as old as the world.

"Is he really an anarchist, then?" she asked.

"Only in that sense I speak of," replied Syme; "or if you prefer it, in that nonsense."

She drew her broad brows together and said abruptly—

"He wouldn't really use—bombs or that sort of thing?"

Syme broke into a great laugh, that seemed too large for his slight and somewhat dandified figure.

"Good Lord, no!" he said, "that has to be done anonymously."

And at that the corners of her own mouth broke into a smile, and she thought with a simultaneous pleasure of Gregory's absurdity and of his safety.

SYME strolled with her to a seat in the corner of the garden, and continued to pour out his opinions. For he was a sincere man, and in spite of his superficial airs and graces, at root a humble one. And it is always the humble man who talks too much; the proud man watches himself too closely. He defended respectability with violence and exaggeration. He grew passionate in his praise of tidiness and propriety. All the time there was a smell of lilac all round him. Once he heard very faintly in some distant street a barrel-organ begin to play, and it seemed to him that his heroic words were moving to a tiny tune from under or beyond the world.

He stared and talked at the girl's red hair and amused face for what seemed to be a few minutes; and then, feeling that the groups in such a place should mix, rose to his feet. To his astonishment, he discovered the whole garden empty. Every one had gone long ago, and he went himself with a rather hurried apology. He left with a sense of champagne in his head, which he could not afterwards explain. In the wild events which were to follow this girl had no part at all; he never saw her again until all his tale was over. And yet, in some indescribable way, she kept recurring like a motive in music through all his mad adventures afterwards, and the glory of her strange hair ran like a red thread through those dark and ill-drawn tapes-

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tries of the night. For what followed was so improbable, that it might well have been a dream.

When Syme went out into the starlit street, he found it for the moment empty. Then he realised (in some odd way) that the silence was rather a living silence than a dead one. Directly outside the door stood a street lamp, whose gleam gilded the leaves of the tree that bent out over the fence behind him. About a foot from the lamp-post stood a figure almost as rigid and motionless as the lamp-post itself. The tall hat and long frock-coat were black; the face, in an abrupt shadow, was almost as dark. Only a fringe of fiery hair against the light, and also something aggressive in the attitude, proclaimed that it was the poet Gregory. He had something of the look of a masked bravo waiting sword in hand for his foe.

He made a sort of doubtful salute, which Syme somewhat more formally returned.

"I was waiting for you," said Gregory. "Might I have a moment's conversation?"

"Certainly. About what?" asked Syme in a sort of weak wonder.

Gregory struck out with his stick at the lamp-post, and then at the tree.

"About *this* and *this*," he cried, "about order and anarchy. There is your precious order, that lean, iron lamp, ugly and barren; and there is anarchy, rich, living, reproducing itself—there is anarchy, splendid in green and gold."

"All the same," replied Syme patiently, "just at present you only see the tree by the light of the lamp. I wonder when you would ever see the lamp by the light of the tree." Then after a pause he said, "But may I ask if you have been standing out here in the dark only to resume our little argument?"

"No," cried out Gregory, in a voice that rang down the street, "I did not stand here to resume our argument, but to end it forever."

The silence fell again, and Syme, though he understood nothing, listened instinctively for something serious. Gregory began in a smooth voice and with a rather bewildering smile.

"Mr. Syme," he said, "this evening you succeeded in doing something rather remarkable. You did something to me that no man born of woman has ever succeeded in doing before."

"Indeed!"

"NOW I remember," resumed Gregory reflectively, "one other person succeeded in doing it. The captain of a penny steamer (if I remember correctly) at Southend. You have irritated me."

"I am very sorry," replied Syme with gravity.

"I am afraid my fury and your insult are too shocking to be wiped out even with an apology," said Gregory very calmly. "No duel could wipe it out. If I struck you dead I could not wipe it out. There is only one way by which that insult can be erased, and that way I choose. I am going, at the possible sacrifice of my life and honour, to *prove* to you that you were wrong in what you said."

"In what I said?"

"You said I was not serious about being an anarchist."

"There are degrees of seriousness," replied Syme. "I have never doubted that you were perfectly sincere in this sense, that you thought what you said well worth saying, that you thought a paradox might wake men up to a neglected truth."

Gregory stared at him steadily and painfully.

"And in no other sense," he asked, "you think me serious? You think me a *flâneur* who lets fall occasional truths. You do not think that in a deeper, a more deadly sense, I am serious."

Syme struck his stick violently on the stones of the road.

"Serious!" he cried. "Good Lord! is this street serious? Are these damned Chinese lanterns serious? Is the whole caboodle serious? One comes here and talks a pack of bosh, and perhaps some sense as well, but I should think very little of a man who didn't keep something in the background of his life that was more serious than all this talking—something more serious, whether it was religion or only drink."

"Very well," said Gregory, his face darkening, "you shall see something more serious than either drink or religion."

Syme stood waiting with his usual air of mildness until Gregory again opened his lips.

"You spoke just now of having a religion. Is is really true that you have one?"

"Oh," said Syme with a beaming smile, "we are all Catholics now."

"Then may I ask you to swear by whatever gods or saints your religion involves that you will *not* reveal what I am

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going to tell you to any son of Adam, and especially not to the police? Will you swear that! If you will take upon yourself this awful abnegation, if you will consent to burden your soul with a vow that you should never make and a knowledge you should never dream about, I will promise you in return—"

"You will promise me in return?" inquired Syme, as the other paused.

"I will promise you a very entertaining evening."

Syme suddenly took off his hat.

"Your offer," he said, "is far too idiotic to be declined. You say that a poet is always an anarchist. I disagree; but I hope at least that he is always a sportsman. Permit me, here and now, to swear as a Christian, and promise as a good comrade and a fellow-artist, that I will not report anything of this, whatever it is, to the police. And now, in the name of Colney Hatch, what is it?"

"I think," said Gregory, with placid irrelevancy, "that we will call a cab."

He gave two long whistles, and a hansom came rattling down the road. The two got into it in silence. Gregory gave through the trap the address of an obscure public-house on the Chiswick bank of the river. The cab whisked itself away again, and in it these two fantastics quitted their fantastic town.

CHAPTER II

THE SECRET OF GABRIEL SYME

THE cab pulled up before a particularly dreary and greasy beershop, into which Gregory rapidly conducted his companion. They seated themselves in a close and dim sort of bar-parlour, at a stained wooden table with one wooden leg. The room was so small and dark, that very little could be seen of the attendant who was summoned, beyond a vague and dark impression of something bulky and bearded.

"Will you take a little supper?" asked Gregory politely. "The *pâté de foie gras* is not good here, but I can recommend the game."

Syme received the remark with stolidity, imagining it to be a joke. Accepting the vein of humour, he said, with a well-bred indifference—

"Oh, bring me some lobster mayonnaise."

To his indescribable astonishment, the man only said, "Certainly, sir!"

"What will you drink?" resumed Gregory, with the same careless yet apologetic air. "I shall only have a *créme de menthe* myself; I have dined. But the champagne can really be trusted. Do let me start you with a half-bottle of Pommery at least?"

"Thank you!" said the motionless Syme. "You are very good."

His further attempts at conversation, somewhat disorganized in themselves, were cut short finally as by a thunderbolt by the actual appearance of the lobster. Syme tasted it, and found it particularly good. Then he suddenly began to eat with great rapidity and appetite.

"Excuse me if I enjoy myself rather obviously!" he said to Gregory, smiling. "I don't often have the luck to have a dream like this. It is new to me for a nightmare to lead to a lobster. It is commonly the other way."

"You are not asleep, I assure you," said Gregory. "You are, on the contrary, close to the most actual and rousing moment of your existence. Ah, here comes your champagne! I admit that there may be a slight disproportion, let us say, between the inner arrangements of this excellent hotel and its simple and unpretentious exterior. But that is all our modesty. We are the most modest men that ever lived on earth."

"And who are *we*?" asked Syme, emptying his champagne glass.

"It is quite simple," replied Gregory. "*We* are the serious anarchists, in whom you do not believe."

"Oh!" said Syme shortly. "You do yourselves well in drinks."

"Yes, we are serious about everything," answered Gregory.

Then after a pause he added—

"If in a few moments this table begins to turn around a little, don't put it down to your inroads into the champagne. I don't wish you to do yourself an injustice."

"Well, if I am not drunk, I am mad," replied Syme with perfect calm; "but I trust I can behave like a gentleman in either condition. May I smoke?"

"Certainly!" said Gregory, producing a cigar-case. "Try one of mine."

Syme took the cigar, clipped the end off with a cigar-cutter out of his waistcoat pocket, put it in his mouth, lit it slowly, and let out a long cloud of smoke. It is not a little to his credit that he performed these rites with so much composure, for almost before he had begun

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them the table at which he sat had begun to revolve, first slowly, and then rapidly, as if at an insane seance.

THE next moment the smoke of his cigar, which had been wavering across the room in snaky twists, went straight up as if from a factory chimney, and the two, with their chairs and table, shot down through the floor as if the earth had swallowed them. They went rattling down a kind of roaring chimney as rapidly as a lift cut loose, and they came with an abrupt bump to the bottom. But when Gregory threw open a pair of doors and let in a red subterranean light, Syme was still smoking, and had not turned a yellow hair.

Gregory led him down a low, vaulted passage, at the end of which was the red light. It was an enormous crimson lantern, nearly as big as a fireplace, fixed over a small but heavy iron door. In the door there was a sort of hatchway or grating, and on this Gregory struck five times. A heavy voice with a foreign accent asked him who he was. To this he gave the more or less unexpected reply. "Mr. Joseph Chamberlain." The heavy hinges began to move.

Inside the doorway the passage gleamed as if it were lined with a network of steel. On a second glance, Syme saw that the glittering pattern was really made up of ranks and ranks of rifles and revolvers, closely packed or interlocked.

"I must ask you to forgive me all these formalities," said Gregory.

"Oh, don't apologize," said Syme. "I know your passion for law and order." With his long, fair hair and rather foppish frockcoat, he looked a singularly frail and fanciful figure as he walked down that shining avenue of death.

They passed through several such passages, and came out at last into a queer steel chamber with curved walls, almost spherical in shape, but presenting, with its tiers of benches, something of the appearance of a scientific lecture-theatre. There were no rifles or pistols in this apartment, but round the walls of it were hung more dubious and dreadful shapes, things that looked like the bulbs of iron plants, or the eggs of iron birds. They were bombs.

"AND now, my dear Mr. Syme," said Gregory, throwing himself in an expansive manner on the bench under

You're sure in line for shaving joy
When you use Thin Gillettes, my boy!
These blades last long—four cost a dime—
You look well-groomed, save dough and time!
Top quality
at rock-bottom price
THIN
Gillette
BLADES
Gillette
4 for 10c
Produced By The Maker Of The Famous Gillette Blue Blade

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the largest bomb, "now we are quite cozy, so let us talk properly. Now, no human words can give you any notion of why I brought you here. It was one of those quite arbitrary emotions, like jumping off a cliff or falling in love. Suffice it to say that you were an inexpressibly irritating fellow, and, to do you justice, you are still. I would break twenty oaths of secrecy for the pleasure of taking you down a peg. That way you have of lighting a cigar would make a priest break the seal of confession. Well, you said that you were quite certain I was not a serious anarchist. Does this place strike you as being serious?"

"It does seem to have a moral under all its gaiety," assented Syme; "but may I ask you two questions? You need not fear to give me information, because, as you remember, you very wisely extorted from me a promise not to tell the police, a promise I shall certainly keep. So it is in mere curiosity that I make my queries. First of all, what is it really all about? What is it you object to? You want to abolish Government?"

"To abolish God!" said Gregory, opening the eyes of a fanatic. "We do not only want to upset a few despotisms and police regulations; that sort of anarchism does exist, but it is a mere branch of the Nonconformists. We dig deeper and we blow you higher. We wish to deny all those arbitrary distinctions of vice and virtue, honour and treachery, upon which mere rebels base themselves. The silly sentimentalists of the French Revolution talked of the Rights of Man! We hate Rights as we hate Wrongs. We have abolished Right and Wrong."

"And Right and Left," said Syme with a simple eagerness, "I hope you will abolish them too. They are much more troublesome to me."

"You spoke of a second question," snapped Gregory.

"With pleasure," resumed Syme. "In all your present acts and surroundings there is a scientific attempt at secrecy. I have an aunt who lived over a shop, but this is the first time I have found people living from preference under a public-house. You have a heavy iron door. You cannot pass it without submitting to the humiliation of calling yourself Mr. Chamberlain. You surround yourself with steel instruments which make the place, if I may say so, more impressive than homelike. May I ask why, after taking all this trouble to barricade yourselves in the bowels of the earth, you then parade your whole secret by talking about anarchism to every silly woman in Saffron Park?"

Gregory smiled.

"The answer is simple," he said. "I told you I was a serious anarchist, and you did not believe me.

"Nor do *they* believe me. Unless I took them into this infernal room they would not believe me."

Syme smoked thoughtfully, and looked at him with interest. Gregory went on slowly.

"The history of the thing might amuse you," he said. "When first I became one of the New Anarchists I tried all kinds of respectable disguises. I dressed up as a bishop. I read up all about bishops in our anarchist pamphlets, in *Superstition the Vampire and Priests of Prey*. I certainly understood from them that bishops are strange and terrible old men keeping a cruel secret from mankind. I was misinformed. When on my first appearing in episcopal gaiters in a drawing-room I cried out in a voice of thunder, 'Down! down! presumptuous human reason!' they found out in some way that I was not a bishop at all. I was nabbed at once. Then I made up as a millionaire; but I defended Capital with so much intelligence that a fool could see that I was quite poor. Then I tried being a major. Now I am a humanitarian myself, but I have, I hope, enough intellectual breadth to understand the position of those who, like Nietzsche, admire violence—the proud, mad war of Nature and all that, you know. I threw myself into the major. I drew my sword and waved it constantly. I called out 'Blood!' abstractedly, like a man calling for wine. I often said, 'Let the weak perish; it is the Law.' Well, well, it seems majors don't do this. I was nabbed again. At last I went in despair to the President of the Central Anarchist Council, who is the greatest man in Europe."

"What is his name?" asked Syme, frowning.

"You would not know it," answered Gregory. "That is his greatness. Caesar and Napoleon put all their genius into being heard of, and they *were* heard of. He puts all his genius into not being heard of, and he is not heard of. But you cannot be for five minutes in the room with him without feeling that Caesar and Napoleon would have been children in his hands."

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HE WAS silent and even pale for a moment, and then resumed—

"But whenever he gives advice it is always something as startling as an epigram, and yet as practical as the Bank of England. I said to him, 'What disguise will hide me from the world? What can I find more respectable than bishops and majors?' He looked at me with his large but indecipherable face. 'You want a safe disguise, do you? You want a dress which will guarantee you harmless; a dress in which no one would ever look for a bomb?' I nodded. He suddenly lifted his lion's voice. 'Why, then, dress up as an *anarchist*, you fool!' he roared so that the room shook. 'Nobody will ever expect you to do anything dangerous then.' And he turned his broad back on me without another word. I took his advice, and have never regretted it. I preached blood and murder to those women day and night, and—by God!—they would let me wheel their perambulators."

Syme sat watching him with some respect in his large, blue eyes.

"You took me in," he said. "It is really a smart dodge."

Then after a pause he added—

"What do you call this tremendous President of yours?"

"We generally call him Sunday," replied Gregory with simplicity. "You see, there are seven members of the Central Anarchist Council, and they are named after days of the week. He is called Sunday, by some of his admirers Bloody Sunday. It is curious you should mention the matter, because the very night you have dropped in (if I may so express it) is the night on which our London branch, which assembles in this room, has to elect its own deputy to fill a vacancy in the Council. The gentleman who has for some time past played, with propriety and general applause, the difficult part of Thursday, has died quite suddenly. Consequently, we have called a meeting this very evening to elect a successor."

He got to his feet and strolled across the room with a sort of smiling embarrassment.

"I feel somehow as if you were my mother, Syme," he continued casually. "I feel that I can confide anything to you, as you have promised to tell nobody. In fact, I will confide to you something that I would not say in so many words to the anarchists who will be coming to the room in about ten minutes. We shall, of course, go through a form of election; but I don't mind telling you that it is practically certain what the result will be." He looked down for a moment modestly. "It is almost a settled thing that I am to be Thursday."

"My dear fellow," said Syme heartily, "I congratulate you. A great career!"

Gregory smiled in deprecation, and walked across the room, talking rapidly.

"As a matter of fact, everything is ready for me on this table," he said, "and the ceremony will probably be the shortest possible."

Syme also strolled across to the table, and found lying across it a walking-stick, which turned out on examination to be a sword-stick, a large Colt's revolver, a sandwich case, and a formidable flask of brandy. Over the chair, beside the table, was thrown a heavy-looking cape or cloak.

"I have only to get the form of election finished," continued Gregory with animation, "then I snatch up this cloak and stick, stuff these other things into my pocket, step out of a door in this cavern, which opens on the river, where there is a steam-tug already waiting for me, and then—then—oh, the wild joy of being Thursday!" And he clasped his hands.

SYME, who had sat down once more with his usual insolent languor, got to his feet with an unusual air of hesitation.

"Why is it," he asked vaguely, "that I think you are quite a decent fellow? Why do I positively like you, Gregory?" He paused a moment, and then added with a sort of fresh curiosity, "Is it because you are such an ass?"

There was a thoughtful silence again, and then he cried out—

"Well, damn it all! this is the funniest situation I have ever been in my life, and I am going to act accordingly. Gregory, I gave you a promise before I came into this place. That promise I would keep under red-hot pincers. Would you give me, for my own safety, a little promise of the same kind?"

"A promise?" asked Gregory, wondering.

"Yes," said Syme very seriously, "a promise. I swore before God that I would not tell your secret to the police. Will you swear by Humanity, or whatever beastly thing you believe in, that you will not tell my secret to the anarchists?"

"Your secret?" asked the staring Gregory. "Have you got a secret?"

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"Yes," said Syme, "I have a secret." Then after a pause, "Will you swear?"

Gregory glared at him gravely for a few moments, and then said abruptly—

"You must have bewitched me, but I feel a furious curiosity about you. Yes, I will swear not to tell the anarchists anything you tell me. But look sharp, for they will be here in a couple of minutes."

Syme rose slowly to his feet and thrust his long, white hands into his long, grey trousers' pockets. Almost as he did so there came five knocks on the outer grating, proclaiming the arrival of the first of the conspirators.

"Well," said Syme slowly, "I don't know how to tell you the truth more shortly than by saying that your expedient of dressing up as an aimless poet is not confined to you or your President. We have known the dodge for some time at Scotland Yard."

Gregory tried to spring up straight, but he swayed thrice.

"What do you say?" he asked in an inhuman voice.

"Yes," said Syme simply, "I am a police detective. But I think I hear your friends coming."

From the doorway there came a murmur of "Mr. Joseph Chamberlain." It was repeated twice and thrice, and then thirty times, and the crowd of Joseph Chamberlains (a solemn thought) could be heard trampling down the corridor.

CHAPTER III

THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY

BEFORE one of the fresh faces could appear at the doorway, Gregory's stunned surprise had fallen from him. He was beside the table with a bound, and a noise in his throat like a wild beast. He caught up the Colt's revolver and took aim at Syme. Syme did not flinch, but he put up a pale and polite hand.

"Don't be such a silly man," he said, with the effeminate dignity of a curate. "Don't you see it's not necessary? Don't you see that we're both in the same boat? Yes, and jolly seasick."

Gregory could not speak, but he could not fire either, and he looked his question.

"Don't you see we've checkmated each other?" cried Syme. "I can't tell the police you are an anarchist. You can't tell the anarchists I'm a policeman. I can only watch you, knowing what you are; you can only watch me, knowing what I am. In short, it's a lonely, intellectual duel, my head against yours. I'm a policeman deprived of the help of the police. You, my poor fellow, are an anarchist deprived of the help of that law and organization which is so essential to anarchy. The one solitary difference is in your favour. You are not surrounded by inquisitive policemen; I am surrounded by inquisitive anarchists. I cannot betray you, but I might betray myself. Come, come! wait and see me betray myself. I shall do it so nicely."

Gregory put the pistol slowly down, still staring at Syme as if he were a sea-monster.

"I don't believe in immortality," he said at last, "but if, after all this, you were to break your word, God would make a hell only for you, to howl in forever."

"I shall not break my word," said Syme sternly, "nor will you break yours. Here are your friends."

The mass of the anarchists entered the room heavily, with a slouching and somewhat weary gait; but one little man, with a black beard and glasses—a man somewhat of the type of Mr. Tim Healy—detached himself, and bustled forward with some papers in his hand.

"Comrade Gregory," he said, "I suppose this man is a delegate?"

Gregory, taken by surprise, looked down and muttered the name of Syme; but Syme replied almost pertly—

"I am glad to see that your gate is well enough guarded to make it hard for any one to be here who was not a delegate."

The brow of the little man with the black beard was, however, still contracted with something like suspicion.

"What branch do you represent?" he asked sharply.

"I should hardly call it a branch," said Syme, laughing; "I should call it at the very least a root."

"What do you mean?"

"The fact is," said Syme serenely, "the truth is I am a Sabbatarian. I have been specially sent here to see that you show a due observance of Sunday."

The little man dropped one of his papers, and a flicker of fear went over all the faces of the group. Evidently the awful President, whose name was Sunday, did sometimes send down such irregular ambassadors to such branch meetings.

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"Well, comrade," said the man with the papers after a pause, "I suppose we'd better give you a seat in the meeting?"

"If you ask my advice as a friend," said Syme with severe benevolence, "I think you'd better."

WHEN Gregory heard the dangerous dialogue end, with a sudden safety for his rival, he rose abruptly and paced the floor in painful thought. He was, indeed, in an agony of diplomacy. It was clear that Syme's inspired impudence was likely to bring him out of all merely accidental dilemmas. Little was to be hoped from them. He could not himself betray Syme, partly from honour, but partly also because, if he betrayed him and for some reason failed to destroy him, the Syme who escaped would be a Syme freed from all obligation of secrecy, a Syme who would simply walk to the nearest police station. After all, it was only one night's discussion, and only one detective who would know of it. He would let out as little as possible of their plans that night, and then let Syme go, and chance it.

He strode across to the group of anarchists, which was already distributing itself along the benches.

"I think it is time we began," he said; "the steam-tug is waiting on the river already. I move that Comrade Buttons take the chair."

This being approved by a show of hands, the little man with the papers slipped into the presidential seat.

"Comrades," he began, as sharp as a pistol-shot, "our meeting to-night is important, though it need not be long. This branch has always had the honour of electing Thursdays for the Central European Council. We have elected many and splendid Thursdays. We all lament the sad decease of the heroic worker who occupied the post until last week. As you know, his services to the cause were considerable. He organized the great dynamite coup of Brighton which, under happier circumstances, ought to have killed everybody on the pier. As you also know, his death was as self-denying as his life, for he died through his faith in a hygienic mixture of chalk and water as a substitute for milk, which beverage he regarded as barbaric, and as involving cruelty to the cow. Cruelty, or anything approaching to cruelty, revolted him always. But it is not to acclaim his virtues that we are met, but for a harder task. It is difficult properly to praise his qualities, but it is more difficult to replace them. Upon you, comrades, it devolves this evening to choose out of the company present the man who shall be Thursday. If any comrade suggests a name I will put it to the vote. If no comrade suggests a name, I can only tell myself that that dear dynamiter, who is gone from us, has carried into the unknowable abysses the last secret of his virtue and his innocence."

There was a stir of almost inaudible applause, such as is sometimes heard in church. Then a large old man, with a long and venerable white beard, perhaps the only real working-man present, rose lumberingly and said—

"I move that Comrade Gregory be elected Thursday," and sat lumberingly down again.

"Does any one second?" asked the chairman.

A little man with a velvet coat and pointed beard seconded.

"Before I put the matter to the vote," said the chairman, "I will call on Comrade Gregory to make a statement."

Gregory rose amid a great rumble of applause. His face was deadly pale, so that by contrast his queer red hair looked almost scarlet. But he was smiling, and altogether at ease. He had made up his mind, and he saw his best policy quite plain in front of him like a white road. His best chance was to make a softened and ambiguous speech, such as would leave on the detective's mind the impression that the anarchist brotherhood was a very mild affair after all. He believed in his own literary power, his capacity for suggesting fine shades and picking perfect words. He thought that with care he could succeed, in spite of all the people around him, in conveying an impression of the institution, subtly and delicately false. Syme had once thought that anarchists, under all their bravado, were only playing the fool. Could he not now, in the hour of peril, make Syme think so again?

"COMRADES," began Gregory, in a low but penetrating voice, "it is not necessary for me to tell you what is my policy, for it is your policy also. Our belief has been slandered, it has been disfigured, it has been utterly confused and concealed, but it has never been altered. Those who talk about anarchism and its dangers go everywhere and anywhere to

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get their information, except to us, except to the fountain head. They learn about anarchists from sixpenny novels; they learn about anarchists from tradesmen's newspapers; they learn about anarchists from *Ally Sloper's Half-Holiday* and the *Sporting Times*. They never learn about anarchists from anarchists. We have no chance of denying the mountainous slanders which are heaped upon our heads from one end of Europe to another. The man who has always heard that we are walking plagues has never heard our reply. I know that he will not hear it tonight, though my passion were to rend the roof. For it is deep, deep under the earth that the persecuted are permitted to assemble, as the Christians assembled in the Catacombs. But if, by some incredible accident, there were here tonight a man who all his life had thus immensely misunderstood us, I would put this question to him: 'When those Christians met in those Catacombs, what sort of moral reputation had they in the streets above? What tales were told of their atrocities by one educated Roman to another? Suppose' (I would say to him), 'suppose that we are only repeating that still mysterious paradox of history.

Suppose we seem as shocking as the Christians because we are really as harmless as the Christians. Suppose we seem as mad as the Christians because we are really as meek."

The applause that had greeted the opening sentences had been gradually growing fainter, and at the last word it stopped suddenly. In the abrupt silence, the man with the velvet jacket said, in a high, squeaky voice—

"I'm not meek!"

"Comrade Witherspoon tells us," resumed Gregory, "that he is not meek. Ah, how little he knows himself! His words are, indeed, extravagant; his appearance is ferocious, and even (to an ordinary taste) unattractive. But only the eye of a friendship as deep and delicate as mine can perceive the deep foundation of solid meekness which lies at the base of him, too deep even for himself to see. I repeat, we are the true early Christians, only that we come too late. We are simple, as they were simple—look at Comrade Witherspoon. We are modest, as they were modest—look at me. We are merciful—"

"No, no!" called out Mr. Witherspoon with the velvet jacket.

"I say we are merciful," repeated Gregory furiously, "as the early Christians were merciful. Yet this did not prevent their being accused of eating human flesh. We do not eat human flesh—"

"Shame!" cried Witherspoon. "Why not?"

"Comrade Witherspoon," said Gregory, with a feverish gaiety, "is anxious to know why nobody eats him (laughter). In our society, at any rate, which loves him sincerely, which is founded upon love—"

"No, no!" said Witherspoon, "down with love."

"Which is founded upon love," repeated Gregory, grinding his teeth, "there will be no difficulty about the aims which we shall pursue as a body, or which I should pursue were I chosen as the representative of that body. Superbly careless of the slanders that represent us as assassins and enemies of human society, we shall pursue, with moral courage and quiet, intellectual pressure, the permanent ideals of brotherhood and simplicity."

Gregory resumed his seat and passed his hand across his forehead. The silence was sudden and awkward, but the chairman rose like an automaton, and said in a colourless voice—

"Does any one oppose the election of Comrade Gregory?"

THE assembly seemed vague and subconsciously disappointed, and Comrade Witherspoon moved restlessly on his seat and muttered in his thick beard. By the sheer rush of routine, however, the motion would have been put and carried. But as the chairman was opening his mouth to put it, Syme sprang to his feet and said in a small and quiet voice—

"Yes, Mr. Chairman, I oppose."

The most effective fact in oratory is an unexpected change in the voice. Mr. Gabriel Syme evidently understood oratory. Having said these first formal words in a moderated tone and with a brief simplicity, he made his next word ring and volley in the vault as if one of the guns had gone off.

"Comrades!" he cried, in a voice that made every man jump out of his boots, "have we come here for this? Do we live underground like rats in order to listen to talk like this? This is talk we might listen to while eating buns at a Sunday-school treat. Do we line these walls with weapons and bar that door with death lest any one should come and hear Com-

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rade Gregory saying to us, 'Be good, and you will be happy,' 'Honesty is the best policy,' and 'Virtue is its own reward'? There was not a word in Comrade Gregory's address to which a curate could not have listened with pleasure (hear, hear). But I am not a curate (loud cheers), and I did not listen to it with pleasure (renewed cheers). The man who is fitted to make a good curate is not fitted to make a resolute, forcible, and efficient Thursday (hear, hear).

"Comrade Gregory has told us, in only too apologetic a tone, that we are not the enemies of society. But I say that we are the enemies of society, and so much the worse for society. We are the enemies of society, for society is the enemy of humanity, its oldest and its most pitiless enemy (hear, hear). Comrade Gregory has told you (apologetically again) that we are not murderers. There I agree. We are not murderers, we are executioners (cheers)."

Ever since Syme had risen Gregory had sat staring at him, his face idiotic with astonishment. Now in the pause his lips of clay parted, and he said, with an automatic and lifeless distinctness—

"You damnable hypocrite!"

Syme looked straight into those frightful eyes with his own pale blue ones, and said with dignity—

"Comrade Gregory accuses me of hypocrisy. He knows as well as I do that I am keeping all my engagements and doing nothing but my duty. I do not mince words. I do not pretend to. I say that Comrade Gregory is unfit to be Thursday for all his amiable qualities. He is unfit to be Thursday because of his amiable qualities. We do not want the Supreme Council of Anarchy infected with a maudlin mercy (hear, hear). This is no time for ceremonial politeness, neither is it a time for ceremonial modesty. I set myself against Comrade Gregory as I would set myself against all the Governments of Europe, because the anarchist who has given himself to anarchy

Suddenly the table began to whirl, as if at an insane séance

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has forgotten modesty as much as he has forgotten pride (cheers). I am not a man at all; I am a cause (renewed cheers). I set myself against Comrade Gregory as impersonally and as calmly as I should choose one pistol rather than another out of that rack upon the wall; and I say that rather than have Gregory and his milk-and-water methods on the Supreme Council, I would offer myself for election—"

His sentence was drowned in a deafening cataract of applause. The faces, that had grown fiercer and fiercer with approval as his tirade grew more and more uncompromising, were now distorted with grins of anticipation or cloven with delighted cries. At the moment when he announced himself as ready to stand for the post of Thursday, a roar of excitement and assent broke forth, and became uncontrollable, and at the same moment Gregory sprang to his feet, with foam upon his mouth, and shouted against the shouting.

"Stop, you blasted madmen!" he cried, at the top of a voice that tore his throat. "Stop, you—"

But louder than Gregory's shouting and louder than the roar of the room came the voice of Syme, still speaking in a peal of pitiless thunder—

"I do not go to the Council to rebut that slander that calls us murderers; I go to earn it (loud and prolonged cheering). To the priest who says these men are the enemies of religion, to the judge who says these men are the enemies of law, to the fat parliamentarian who says these men are the enemeis of order and public decency, to all these I will reply, 'You are false kings, but you are true prophets. I am come to destroy you, and to fulfill your prophecies.'"

THE heavy clamour gradually died away, but before it had ceased Witherspoon had jumped to his feet, his hair and beard all on end, and had said—

"I move, as an amendment, that Comrade Syme be appointed to the post."

"Stop all this, I tell you!" cried Gregory, with frantic face and hands. "Stop it, it is all—"

The voice of the chairman clove his speech with a cold accent.

"Does any one second this amendment?" he said.

A tall, tired man, with melancholy eyes and an American chin beard, was observed on the back bench to be slowly rising to his feet. Gregory had been screaming for some time past; now there was a change in his accent, more shocking than any scream.

"I end all this!" he said, in a voice as heavy as stone. "This man cannot be elected. He is a—"

"Yes," said Syme, quite motionless, "what is he?"

Gregory's mouth worked twice without sound; then slowly the blood began to crawl back into his dead face.

"He is a man quite inexperienced in our work," he said, and sat down abruptly.

Before he had done so, the long, lean man with the American beard was again upon his feet, and was repeating in a high American monotone—

"I beg to second the election of Comrade Syme."

"The amendment will, as usual, be put first," said Mr. Buttons, the chairman, with mechanical rapidity. "The question is that Comrade Syme—"

Gregory had again sprung to his feet, panting and passionate.

"Comrades," he cried out, "I [redacted] madman."

"Oh, oh!" said Mr. Witherspoon.

"I am not a madman," reiterated Gregory, with a frightful sincerity which for a moment staggered the room, "but I give you a counsel which you can call mad if you like. No, I will not call it a counsel, for I can give you no reason for it. I will call it a command. Call it a mad command, but act upon it. Strike, but hear me! Kill me, but obey me! Do not elect this man."

Truth is so terrible, even in fetters, that for a moment Syme's slender and insane victory swayed like a reed. But you could not have guessed it from Syme's bleak blue eyes. He merely began—

"Comrade Gregory commands—"

Then the spell was snapped, and one anarchist called out to Gregory—

"Who are you? You are not Sunday;" and another anarchist added in a heavier voice, "And you are not Thursday."

"Comrades," cried Gregory, in a voice like that of a martyr who in an ecstasy of pain has passed beyond pain, "it is nothing to me whether you detest me as a tyrant or detest me as a slave. If you will not take my command, accept my degradation. I kneel to you. I throw myself at your feet. I implore you. Do not elect this man."

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"Comrade Gregory," said the chairman after a painful pause, "this is really not quite dignified."

For the first time in the proceedings there was for a few seconds a real silence. Then Gregory fell back in his seat, a pale wreck of a man, and the chairman repeated, like a piece of clockwork suddenly started again—

"The question is that Comrade Syme be elected to the post of Thursday on the General Council."

The roar rose like the sea, the hands rose like a forest, and three minutes afterwards Mr. Gabriel Syme, of the Secret Police Service, was elected to the post of Thursday on the General Council of the Anarchists of Europe.

EVERY one in the room seemed to feel the tug waiting on the river, the sword-stick and the revolver, waiting on the table. The instant the election was ended and irrevocable, and Syme had received the paper proving his election, they all sprang to their feet, and the fiery groups moved and mixed in the room. Syme found himself, somehow or other, face to face with Gregory, who still regarded him with a stare of stunned hatred. They were silent for many minutes.

"You are a devil!" said Gregory at last.

"And you are a gentleman," said Syme with gravity.

"It was you that entrapped me," began Gregory, shaking from head to foot, "entrapped me into—"

"Talk sense," said Syme shortly. "Into what sort of devils' parliament have you entrapped me, if it comes to that? You made me swear before I made you. Perhaps we are both doing what we think right. But what we think right is so damned different that there can be nothing between us in the way of concession. There is nothing possible between us but honour and death," and he pulled the great cloak about his shoulders and picked up the flask from the table.

"The boat is quite ready," said Mr. Buttons, bustling up. "Be good enough to step this way."

With a gesture that revealed the shop-walker, he led Syme down a short, iron-bound passage, the still agonised Gregory following feverishly at their heels. At the end of the passage was a door, which Buttons opened sharply, showing a sudden blue and silver picture of the moonlit river, that looked like a scene in a theatre. Close to the opening lay a dark, dwarfish steam-launch, like a baby dragon with one red eye.

Almost in the act of stepping on board, Gabriel Syme turned to the gaping Gregory.

"You have kept your word," he said gently, with his face in shadow. "You are a man of honour, and I thank you. You have kept it even down to a small particular. There was one special thing you promised me at the beginning of the affair, and which you have certainly given me by the end of it."

"What do you mean?" cried the chaotic Gregory. "What did I promise you?"

"A very entertaining evening," said Syme, and he made a military salute with the sword-stick as the steamboat slid away.

CHAPTER IV

THE TALE OF A DETECTIVE

GABRIEL SYME was not merely a detective who pretended to be a poet; he was really a poet who had become a detective. Nor was his hatred of anarchy hypocritical. He was one of those who are driven early in life into too conservative an attitude by the bewildering folly of most revolutionists. He had not attained it by any tame tradition. His respectability was spontaneous and sudden, a rebellion against rebellion. He came of a family of cranks, in which all the oldest people had all the newest notions. One of his uncles always walked about without a hat, and another had made an unsuccessful attempt to walk about with a hat and nothing else. His father cultivated art and self-realisation; his mother went in for simplicity and hygiene. Hence the child, during his tenderer years, was wholly unacquainted with any drink between the extremes of absinth and cocoa, of both of which he had a healthy dislike. The more his mother preached a more than Puritan abstinence the more did his father expand into a more than pagan latitude; and by the time the former had come to enforcing vegetarianism, the latter had pretty well reached the point of defending cannibalism.

Being surrounded with every conceivable kind of revolt from infancy, Gabriel had to revolt into something, so he revolted into the only thing left—sanity. But there was just enough in him of the

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blood of these fanatics to make even his protest for common-sense a little too fierce to be sensible. His hatred of modern lawlessness had been crowned also by an accident. It happened that he was walking in a side street at the instant of a dynamite outrage. He had been blind and deaf for a moment, and then seen, the smoke clearing, the broken windows and the bleeding faces. After that he went about as usual—quiet, courteous, rather gentle; but there was a spot on his mind that was not sane. He did not regard anarchists, as most of us do, as a handful of morbid men, combining ignorance with intellectualism. He regarded them as a huge and pitiless peril, like a Chinese invasion.

He poured perpetually into newspapers and their waste-paper baskets a torrent of tales, verses and violent articles, warning men of this deluge of barbaric denial. But he seemed to be getting no nearer his enemy, and, what was worse, no nearer a living. As he paced the Thames embankment, bitterly biting a cheap cigar and brooding on the advance of Anarchy, there was no anarchist with a bomb in his pocket so savage or so solitary as he. Indeed, he always felt that Government stood alone and desperate, with its back to the wall. He was too quixotic to have cared for it otherwise.

He walked on the Embankment once under a dark red sunset. The red river reflected the red sky, and they both reflected his anger. The sky, indeed, was so swarthy, and the light on the river relatively so lurid, that the water almost seemed of fiercer flame than the sunset it mirrored.

It looked like a stream of literal fire winding under the vast caverns of a subterranean country.

Syme was shabby in those days. He wore an old-fashioned black chimney-pot hat; he was wrapped in a yet more old-fashioned cloak, black and ragged; and the combination gave him the look of the early villains in Dickens and Bulwer Lytton. Also his yellow beard and hair were more unkempt and leonine than when they appeared long afterwards, cut and pointed, on the lawns of Saffron Park. A long, lean, black cigar, bought in Soho for two-pence, stood out from between his tightened teeth, and altogether he looked a very satisfactory specimen of the anarchists upon whom he had vowed a holy war. Perhaps this was why a policeman on the Embankment spoke to him, and said "Good evening."

SYME, at a crisis of his morbid fears for humanity, seemed stung by the mere stolidity of the automatic official, a mere bulk of blue in the twilight.

"A good evening is it?" he said sharply. "You fellows would call the end of the world a good evening. Look at that bloody red sun and that bloody river! I tell you that if that were literally human blood, spilt and shining, you would still be standing here as solid as ever, looking out for some poor harmless tramp whom you could move on. You policemen are cruel to the poor, but I could forgive you even your cruelty if it were not for your calm."

"If we are calm," replied the policeman, "it is the calm of organized resistance."

"Eh?" said Syme, staring.

"The soldier must be calm in the thick of the battle," pursued the policeman. "The composure of an army is the anger of a nation."

"Good God, the Board Schools!" said Syme. "Is this undenominational education?"

"No," said the policeman sadly, "I never had any of those advantages. The Board Schools came after my time. What education I had was very rough and old-fashioned, I am afraid."

"Where did you have it?" asked Syme, wondering.

"Oh, at Harrow," said the policeman.

The class sympathies which, false as they are, are the truest things in so many men, broke out of Syme before he could control them.

"But, good Lord, man," he said, "you oughtn't to be a policeman!"

The policeman sighed.

"I know," he said solemnly, "I know I am not worthy."

"But why did you join the police?" asked Syme with rude curiosity.

"For much the same reason that you abused the police," replied the other. "I found that there was a special opening in the service for those whose fears for humanity were concerned rather with the aberrations of the scientific intellect than with the normal and excusable, though excessive, outbreaks of the human will. I trust I make myself clear."

"If you mean that you make your opinion clear," said Syme, "I suppose you do. But as for making yourself clear, it is

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the last thing you do. How comes a man like you to be talking philosophy in a blue helmet on the Thames embankment?"

"You have evidently not heard of the latest development in our police system," replied the other. "I am not surprised at it. We are keeping it rather dark from the educated class, because that class contains most of our enemies. But you seem to be exactly in the right frame of mind. I think you might almost join us."

"Join you in what?" asked Syme.

"I will tell you," said the policeman slowly. "This is the situation: The head of one of our departments, one of the most celebrated detectives in Europe, has long been of opinion that a purely intellectual conspiracy would soon threaten the very existence of civilization. He is certain that the scientific and artistic worlds are silently bound in a crusade against the Family and the State. He has, therefore, formed a special corps of policemen, policemen who are also philosophers. It is their business to watch the beginnings of this conspiracy, not merely in a criminal but in a controversial sense. I am a democrat myself, and I am fully aware of the value of the ordinary man in matters of ordinary valour or virtue. But it would obviously be undesirable to employ the common policeman in an investigation which is also a heresy hunt."

SYME'S eyes were bright with a sympathetic curiosity.

"What do you do, then?" he said.

"The work of the philosophical policeman," replied the man in blue, "is at once bolder and more subtle than that of the ordinary detective. The ordinary detective goes to pot-houses to arrest thieves; we go to artistic tea-parties to detect pessimists. The ordinary detective discovers from a ledger or a diary that a crime has been committed. We discover from a book of sonnets that a crime will be committed. We have to trace the origin of those dreadful thoughts that drive men on at last to intellectual fanaticism and intellectual crime. We were only just in time to prevent the assassination at Hartlepool, and that was entirely due to the fact that our Mr. Wilks (a smart young fellow) thoroughly understood a triolet."

"Do you mean," asked Syme, "that there is really as much connection between crime and the modern intellect as all that?"

"You are not sufficiently democratic," answered the policeman, "but you were right when you said just now that our ordinary treatment of the poor criminal was a pretty brutal business. I tell you I am sometimes sick of my trade when I see how perpetually it means merely a war upon the ignorant and the desperate. But this new movement of ours is a very different affair. We deny the snobbish English assumption that the uneducated are the dangerous criminals. We remember the Roman Emperors. We remember the great poisoning princes of the Renaissance. We say that the dangerous criminal is the educated criminal. We say that the most dangerous criminal now is the entirely lawless modern philosopher. Compared to him, burglars and bigamists are essentially moral men; my heart goes out to them. They accept the essential ideal of man, they merely seek it wrongly. Thieves respect property. They merely wish the property to become their property that they may more perfectly respect it. But philosophers dislike property as property; they wish to destroy the very idea of personal possession. Bigamists respect marriage, or they would not go through the highly ceremonial and even ritualistic formality of bigamy. But philosophers despise marriage as marriage. Murderers respect human life; they merely wish to attain a greater fullness of human life in themselves by the sacrifice of what seems to them to be lesser lives. But philosophers hate life itself, their own as much as other people's."

Syme struck his hands together.

"How true that is," he cried. "I have felt it from my boyhood, but never could state the verbal antithesis. The common criminal is a bad man, but at least he is, as it were, a conditional good man. He says that if only a certain obstacle be removed—say a wealthy uncle—he is then prepared to accept the universe and to praise God. He is a reformer, but not an anarchist. He wishes to cleanse the edifice, but not to destroy it. But the evil philosopher is not trying to alter things, but to annihilate them. Yes, the modern world has retained all those parts of police work which are really oppressive and ignominious, the harrying of the poor, the spying upon the unfortunate. It has given up its more dignified work, the punishment of powerful traitors in

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the State and powerful heresiarchs in the Church. The moderns say we must not punish heretics. My only doubt is whether we have a right to punish anybody else."

"But this is absurd!" cried the policeman, clasping his hands with an excitement uncommon in persons of his figure and costume, "but it is intolerable! I don't know what you're doing, but you're wasting your life. You must, you shall, join our special army against anarchy. Their armies are on our frontiers. Their bolt is ready to fall. A moment more, and you may lose the glory of working with us, perhaps the glory of dying with the last heroes of the world."

"IT IS a chance not to be missed, certainly," assented Syme, "but still I do not quite understand. I know as well as anybody that the modern world is full of lawless little men and mad little movements. But, beastly as they are, they generally have the one merit of disagreeing with each other. How can you talk of their leading one army or hurling one bolt. What is this anarchy?"

"Do not confuse it," replied the constable, "with those chance dynamite outbreaks from Russia or from Ireland, which are really the outbreaks of oppressed, if mistaken, men. This is a vast philosophic movement, consisting of an outer and an inner ring. You might even call the outer ring the laity and the inner ring the priesthood. I prefer to call the outer ring the innocent section, the inner ring the supremely guilty section. The outer ring—the main mass of their supporters—are merely anarchists; that is, men who believe that rules and formulas have destroyed human happiness. They believe that all the evil results of human crime are the results of the system that has called it crime. They do not believe that the crime creates the punishment. They believe that the punishment has created the crime. They believe that if a man murdered seven women he would naturally walk away as blameless as the flowers of spring. They believe that if a man picked a pocket he would naturally feel exquisitely good. These I call the innocent section."

"Oh!" said Syme.

"Naturally, therefore, these people talk about 'a happy time coming'; 'the paradise of the future'; 'mankind freed from the bondage of vice and the bondage of virtue,' and so on. And so also the men of the inner circle speak—the sacred priesthood. They also speak to applauding crowds of the happiness of the future, and of mankind freed at last. But in their mouths"—and the policeman lowered his voice—"in their mouths these happy phrases have a horrible meaning. They are under no illusions; they are too intellectual to think that man upon this earth can ever be quite free of original sin and the struggle. And they mean death. When they say that mankind shall be free at last, they mean that mankind shall commit suicide. When they talk of a paradise without right or wrong, they mean the grave. They have but two objects, to destroy first humanity and then themselves. That is why they throw bombs instead of firing pistols. The innocent rank and file are disappointed because the bomb has not killed the king; but the high-priesthood are happy because it has killed somebody."

'How can I join you?" asked Syme with a sort of passion.

"I know for a fact that there is a vacancy at the moment," said the policeman, "as I have the honour to be somewhat in the confidence of the chief of whom I have spoken. You should really come and see him. Or rather, I should not say see him, nobody ever sees him; but you can talk to him if you like."

"Telephone?" inquired Syme, with interest.

"No," said the policeman placidly, "he has a fancy for always sitting in a pitch-dark room. He says it makes his thoughts brighter. Do come along."

Somewhat dazed and considerably excited, Syme allowed himself to be led to a side-door in the long row of buildings of Scotland Yard. Almost before he knew what he was doing, he had been passed through the hands of about four intermediate officials, and was suddenly shown into a room, the abrupt blackness of which startled him like a blaze of light. It was not the ordinary darkness, in which forms can be faintly traced; it was like going suddenly stone-blind.

"Are you the new recruit?" asked a heavy voice.

And in some strange way, though there was not the shadow of a shape in the gloom, Syme knew two things: first, that it came from a man of massive stature; and second, that the man had his back to him.

"Are you the new recruit?" said the invisible chief, who seemed to have heard

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all about it. "All right. You are engaged."

Syme, quite swept off his feet, made a feeble fight against this irrevocable phrase.

"I really have no experience," he began.

"No one has any experience," said the other, "of the Battle of Armageddon."

"But I am really unfit—"

"You are willing, that is enough," said the unknown.

"Well, really," said Syme, "I don't know any profession of which mere willingness is the final test."

"I do," said the other—"martyrs. I am condemning you to death. Good-day."

THUS it was that when Gabriel Syme came out again into the crimson light of evening, in his shabby black hat and shabby, lawless cloak, he came out a member of the New Detective Corps for the frustration of the great conspiracy. Acting under the advice of his friend the policeman (who was professionally inclined to neatness), he trimmed his hair and beard, bought a good hat, clad himself in an exquisite summer suit of light blue-grey, with a pale yellow flower in the buttonhole, and, in short, became that elegant and rather insupportable person whom Gregory had first encountered in the little garden of Saffron Park. Before he finally left the police premises his friend provided him with a small blue card, on which was written, "The Last Crusade," and a number, the sign of his official authority. He put this carefully in his upper waistcoat pocket, lit a cigarette, and went forth to track and fight the enemy in all the drawing-rooms of London. Where his adventure ultimately led him we have already seen. At about half-past one on a February night he found himself steaming in a small tug up the silent Thames, armed with sword-stick and revolver, the duly elected Thursday of the Central Council of Anarchists.

When Syme stepped out on to the steam-tug he had a singular sensation of stepping out into something entirely new; not merely into the landscape of a new land, but even into the landscape of a new planet. This was mainly due to the insane yet solid decision of that evening, though partly also to an entire change in the weather and the sky since he entered the little tavern some two hours before. Every trace of the passionate plumage of the cloudy sunset had been swept away, and a naked moon stood in a naked sky. The moon was so strong and full, that (by a paradox often to be noticed) it seemed like a weaker sun. It gave, not the sense of bright moonshine, but rather of a dead daylight.

Over the whole landscape lay a luminous and unnatural discoloration, as of that disastrous twilight which Milton spoke of as shed by the sun in eclipse; so that Syme fell easily into his first thought, that he was actually on some other and emptier planet, which circled round some sadder star. But the more he felt this glittering desolation in the moonlit land, the more his own chivalric folly glowed in the night like a great fire. Even the common things he carried with him—the food and the brandy and the loaded pistol—took on exactly that concrete and material poetry which a child feels when he takes a gun upon a journey or a bun with him to bed. The sword-stick and the brandy-flask, though in themselves only the tools of morbid conspirators, became the expressions of his own more healthy romance. The sword-stick became almost the sword of chivalry, and the brandy the wine of the stirrup-cup. For even the most dehumanised modern fantasies depend on some older and simpler figure; the adventures may be mad, but the adventurer must be sane. The dragon without St. George would not even be grotesque. So this inhuman landscape was only imaginative by the presence of a man really human. To Syme's exaggerative mind the bright bleak houses and terraces by the Thames looked as empty as the mountains of the moon. But even the moon is only poetical because there is a man in the moon.

The tug was worked by two men, and with much toil went comparatively slowly. The clear moon that had lit up Chiswick had gone down by the time that they passed Battersea, and when they came under the enormous bulk of Westminster day had already begun to break. It broke like the splitting of great bars of lead, showing bars of silver; and these had brightened like white fire when the tug, changing its onward course, turned inward to a large landing stage rather beyond Charing Cross.

The great stones of the Embankment seemed equally dark and gigantic as Syme looked up at them. They were big and black against the huge white dawn.

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They made him feel that he was landing on the colossal steps of some Egyptian palace; and indeed the thing suited his mood, for he was, in his own mind, mounting to attack the solid thrones of horrible and heathen kings. He leapt out of the boat on to one slimy step, and stood, a dark and slender figure, amid the enormous masonry. The two men in the tug put her off again and turned up stream. They had never spoken a word.

CHAPTER V

THE FEAST OF FEAR

AT FIRST the large stone stair seemed to Syme as deserted as a pyramid; but before he reached the top he had realised that there was a man leaning over the parapet of the Embankment and looking out across the river. As a figure he was quite conventional, clad in a silk hat and frock-coat of the more formal type of fashion; he had a red flower in his buttonhole. As Syme drew nearer to him step by step, he did not even move a hair; and Syme could come close enough to notice even in the dim, pale morning light that his face was long, pale and intellectual, and ended in a small triangular tuft of dark beard at the very point of the chin, all else being clean-shaven. This scrap of hair almost seemed a mere oversight; the rest of the face was of the type that is best shaven—clear-cut, ascetic, and in its way noble. Syme drew closer and closer, noting all this, and still the figure did not stir.

At first an instinct had told Syme that this was the man whom he was meant to meet. Then, seeing that the man made no sign, he had concluded that he was not. And now again he had come back to a certainty that the man had something to do with his mad adventure. For the man remained more still than would have been natural if a stranger had come so close. He was as motionless as a wax-work, and got on the nerves somewhat in the same way. Syme looked again and again at the pale, dignified and delicate face, and the face still looked blankly across the river. Then he took out of his pocket the note from Buttons proving his election, and put it before that sad and beautiful face. Then the man smiled; and his smile was a shock, for it was all on one side, going up in the right cheek and down in the left.

There was nothing, rationally speaking, to scare anyone about this. Many people have this nervous trick of a crooked smile, and in many it is even attractive. But in all Syme's circumstances, with the dark dawn and the deadly errand and the loneliness on the great dripping stones, there was something unnerving in it. There was the silent river and the silent man, a man of even classic face. And there was the last nightmare touch that his smile suddenly went wrong.

The spasm of smile was instantaneous, and the man's face dropped at once into its harmonious melancholy. He spoke without further explanation or inquiry, like a man speaking to an old colleague.

"If we walk up towards Leicester Square," he said, "we shall just be in time for breakfast. Sunday always insists on an early breakfast. Have you had any sleep?"

"No," said Syme.

"Nor have I," answered the man in an ordinary tone. "I shall try to get to bed after breakfast."

He spoke with casual civility, but in an utterly dead voice that contradicted the fanaticism of his face. It seemed almost as if all friendly words were to him lifeless conveniences, and that his only life was hate. After a pause the man spoke again.

"Of course, the Secretary of the branch told you everything that can be told. But the one thing that can never be told is the last notion of the President, for his notions grow like a tropical forest. So in case you don't know, I'd better tell you that he is carrying out his notion of concealing ourselves by not concealing ourselves to the most extraordinary lengths just now. Originally, of course, we met in a cell underground, just as your branch does. Then Sunday made us take a private room at an ordinary restaurant. He said that if you didn't seem to be hiding nobody hunted you out. Well, he is the only man on earth, I knew; but sometimes I really think that his huge brain is going a little mad in its old age. For now we flaunt ourselves before the public. We have our breakfast on a balcony —on a balcony, if you please—overlooking Leicester Square."

"And what do the people say?" asked Syme.

"It's quite simple what they say," answered his guide. "They say we are a

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lot of jolly gentlemen who pretend they are anarchists."

"It seems to me a very clever idea," said Syme.

"Clever! God blast your impudence! Clever!" cried out the other in a sudden, shrill voice which was a startling and discordant as his crooked smile. "When you've seen Sunday for a split second you'll leave off calling him clever."

WITH this they emerged out of a narrow street, and saw the early sunlight filling Leicester Square. It will never be known, I suppose, why this square itself should look so alien and in some ways so continental. It will never be known whether it was the foreign look that attracted the foreigners or the foreigners who gave it the foreign look. But on this particular morning the effect seemed singularly bright and clear. Between the open square and the sunlit leaves and the statue and the Saracenic outlines of the Alhambra, it looked the replica of some French or even Spanish public place. And this effect increased in Syme the sensation, which in many shapes he had had through the whole adventure, the eerie sensation of having strayed into a new world. As a fact, he had bought bad cigars round Leicester Square ever since he was a boy. But as he turned that corner, and saw the trees and the Moorish cupola, he could have sworn that he was turning into an unknown Place de something or other in some foreign town.

At one corner of the square there projected a kind of angle of a prosperous but quiet hotel, the bulk of which belonged to a street behind. In the wall there was one large French window, probably the window of a large coffee-room; and outside this window, almost literally overhanging the square, was a formidably buttressed balcony, big enough to contain a dining-table. In fact, it did contain a dining-table, or more strictly a breakfast-table; and round the breakfast-table, glowing in the sunlight and evident to the street, were a group of noisy and talkative men, all dressed in the insolence of fashion, with white waistcoats and expensive buttonholes. Some of their jokes could almost be heard across the square. Then the grave Secretary gave his unnatural smile, and Syme knew that this boisterous breakfast party was the secret conclave of the European Dynamiters.

Then, as Syme continued to stare at them, he saw something that he had not seen before. He had not seen it literally because it was too large to see. At the nearest end of the balcony, blocking up a great part of the perspective, was the back of a great mountain of a man. When Syme had seen him, his first thought was that the weight of him must break down the balcony of stone. His vastness did not lie only in the fact that

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he was abnormally tall and quite incredibly fat. This man was planned enormously in his original proportions, like a statue carved deliberately as colossal. His head, crowned with white hair, as seen from behind looked bigger than a head ought to be. The ears that stood out from it looked larger than human ears. He was enlarged terribly to scale; and this sense of size was so staggering, that when Syme saw him all the other figures seemed quite suddenly to dwindle and become dwarfish. They were still sitting there as before with their flowers and frock-coats, but now it looked as if the big man was entertaining five children to tea.

As Syme and the guide approached the side door of the hotel, a waiter came out smiling with every tooth in his head.

"The gentlemen are up there, sare," he said. "They do talk and they do laugh at what they talk. They do say they will throw bombs at ze king."

And the waiter hurried away with a napkin over his arm, much pleased with the singular frivolity of the gentlemen up-stairs.

The two men mounted the stairs in silence.

Syme had never thought of asking whether the monstrous man who almost filled and broke the balcony was the great President of whom the others stood in awe. He knew it was so, with an unaccountable but instantaneous certainty. Syme, indeed, was one of those men who are open to all the more nameless psychological influences in a degree a little dangerous to mental health. Utterly devoid of fear in physical dangers, he was a great deal too sensitive to the smell of spiritual evil. Twice already that night little unmeaning things had peeped out at him almost pruriently, and given him a sense of drawing nearer and nearer to the headquarters of hell. And this sense became overpowering as he drew nearer to the great President.

The form it took was a childish and yet hateful fancy. As he walked across the inner room towards the balcony, the large face of Sunday grew larger and larger; and Syme was gripped with a fear that when he was quite close the face would be too big to be possible, and that he would scream aloud. He remembered that as a child he would not look at the mask of Memnon in the British Museum, because it was a face, and so large.

BY AN effort braver than that of leaping over a cliff, he went to an empty seat at the breakfast table and sat down. The men greeted him with good-humoured raillery as if they had always known him. He sobered himself a little by looking at their conventional coats and solid, shining coffee-pot; then he looked again at Sunday. His face was very large, but it was still possible to humanity.

In the presence of the President the whole company looked sufficiently commonplace; nothing about them caught the eye at first, except that by the President's caprice they had been dressed up with a festive respectability, which gave the meal the look of a wedding breakfast. One man indeed stood out at even a superficial glance. He at least was the common or garden Dynamiter. He wore, indeed, the high white collar and satin tie that were the uniform of the occasion; but out of this collar there sprang a head quite unmanageable and quite unmistakable, a bewildering bush of brown hair and beard that almost obscured the eyes like those of a Skye terrier. But the eyes did look out of the tangle, and they were the sad eyes of some Russian serf. The effect of this figure was not terrible like that of the President, but it had every diablerie that can come from the utterly grotesque. If out of that stiff tie and collar there had come abruptly the head of a cat or a dog, it could not have been a more idiotic contrast.

The man's name, it seemed, was Gogol; he was a Pole, and in this circle of days he was called Tuesday. His soul and speech were incurably tragic; he could not force himself to play the prosperous and frivolous part demanded of him by President Sunday. And, indeed, when Syme came in the President, with that daring disregard of public suspicion which was his policy, was actually chaffing Gogol upon his inability to assume conventional graces.

"Our friend Tuesday," said the President in a deep voice at once of quietude and volume, "our friend Tuesday doesn't seem to grasp the idea. He dresses up like a gentleman, but he seems to be too great a soul to behave like one. He insists on the ways of the stage conspirator. Now if a gentleman goes about London in a top hat and a frock-coat, no one need know that he is an anarchist. But if a gentleman puts on a top hat and a frock-

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coat, and then goes about on his hands and knees—well, he may attract attention. That's what Brother Gogol does. He goes about on his hands and knees with such inexhaustible diplomacy, that by this time he finds it quite difficult to walk upright."

"I am not good at goncealment," said Gogol sulkily, with a thick foreign accent; "I am not ashamed of the cause."

"Yes you are, my boy, and so is the cause of you," said the President good-naturedly. "You hide as much as anybody; but you can't do it, you see, you're such an ass! You try to combine two inconsistent methods. When a householder finds a man under his bed, he will probably pause to note the circumstance. But if he finds a man under his bed in a top hat, you will agree with me, my dear Tuesday, that he is not likely even to forget it. Now when you were found under Admiral Biffin's bed—"

"I am not good at deception," said Tuesday gloomily, flushing.

"Right, my boy, right," said the President with a ponderous heartiness, "you aren't good at anything."

While this stream of conversation continued, Syme was looking more steadily at the men around him. As he did so, he gradually felt all his sense of something spiritually queer return.

HE HAD thought at first that they were all of common stature and costume, with the evident exception of the hairy Gogol. But as he looked at the others, he began to see in each of them exactly what he had seen in the man by the river, a demoniac detail somewhere. That lopsided laugh, which would suddenly disfigure the fine face of his original guide, was typical of all these types. Each man had something about him, perceived perhaps at the tenth or twentieth glance, which was not normal, and which seemed hardly human. The only metaphor he could think of was this, that they all looked as men of fashion and presence would look, with the additional twist given in a false and curved mirror.

Only the individual examples will express this half-concealed eccentricity. Syme's original cicerone bore the title of Monday; he was the Secretary of the Council, and his twisted smile was regarded with more terror than anything, except the President's horrible, happy laughter. But now that Syme had more space and light to observe him, there were other touches. His fine face was so emaciated, that Syme thought it must be wasted with some disease; yet somehow the very distress of his dark eyes denied this. It was no physical ill that troubled him. His eyes were alive with intellectual torture, as if pure thought was pain.

He was typical of each of the tribe; each man was subtly and differently wrong. Next to him sat Tuesday, the towzle-headed Gogol, a man more obviously mad. Next was Wednesday, a certain Marquis de St. Eustache, a sufficiently characteristic figure. The first few glances found nothing unusual about him, except that he was the only man at table who wore the fashionable clothes as if they were really his own. He had a black French beard cut square and a black English frock coat cut even squarer. But Syme, sensitive to such things, felt somehow that the man carried a rich atmosphere with him, a rich atmosphere that suffocated. It reminded one irrationally of drowsy odours and of dying lamps in the darker poems of Byron and Poe. With this went a sense of his being clad, not in lighter colours, but in softer materials; his black seemed richer and warmer than the black shades about him, as if it were compounded of profound colour. His black coat looked as if it were only black by being too dense a purple. His black beard looked as if it were only black by being too deep a blue. And in the gloom and thickness of the beard his dark red mouth showed sensual and scornful. Whatever he was he was not a Frenchman; he might be a Jew; he might be something deeper yet in the dark heart of the East. In the bright coloured Persian tiles and pictures showing tyrants hunting, you may see just those almond eyes, those blue-black beards, those cruel, crimson lips.

Then came Syme, and next a very old man, Professor de Worms, who still kept the chair of Friday, though every day it was expected that his death would leave it empty. Save for his intellect, he was in the last dissolution of senile decay. His face was as grey as his long grey beard, his forehead was lifted and fixed finally in a furrow of mild despair. In no other case, not even that of Gogol, did the bridegroom brilliancy of the morning dress express a more painful contrast. For the red flower in his buttonhole showed up against a face that was lit-

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erally discoloured like lead; the whole hideous effect was as if some drunken dandies had put their clothes upon a corpse. When he rose or sat down, which was with long labour and peril, something worse was expressed than mere weakness, something indefinably connected with the horror of the whole scene. It did not express decrepitude merely, but corruption. Another hateful fancy crossed Syme's quivering mind. He could not help thinking that whenever the man moved a leg or arm might fall off.

Right at the end sat the man called Saturday, the simplest and the most baffling of all. He was a short, square man with a dark, square face clean-shaven, a medical practitioner going by the name of Bull. He had that combination of *savoir-faire* with a sort of well-groomed coarseness which is not uncommon in young doctors. He carried his fine clothes with confidence rather than ease, and he mostly wore a set smile. There was nothing whatever odd about him, except that he wore a pair of dark, almost opaque spectacles. It may have been merely a crescendo of nervous fancy that had gone before, but those black discs were dreadful to Syme; they reminded him of half-remembered ugly tales, of some story about pennies being put on the eyes of the dead. Syme's eye always caught the black glasses and the blind grin. Had the dying Professor worn them, or even the pale Secretary, they would have been appropriate. But on the younger and grosser man they seemed only an enigma. They took away the key of the face. You could not tell what his smile or his gravity meant. Partly from this, and partly because he had a vulgar virility wanting in most of the others, it seemed to Syme that he might be the wickedest of all those wicked men. Syme even had the thought that his eyes might be covered up because they were too frightful to see.

CHAPTER VI

THE EXPOSURE

SUCH were the six men who had sworn to destroy the world. Again and again Syme strove to pull together his common sense in their presence. Sometimes, he saw for an instant that these notions were subjective, that he was only looking at ordinary men, one of whom was old, another nervous, another short-sighted. The sense of an unnatural symbolism always settled back on him again. Each figure seemed to be, somehow, on the borderland of things. just as their theory was on the borderland of thought. He knew that each one of these men stood at the extreme end, so to speak, of some wild road of reasoning. He could only fancy, as in some old-world fable, that if a man went westward to the end of the world he would find something—say a tree—that was more or less than a tree, a tree possessed by a spirit; and that if he went east to the end of the world he would find something else that was not wholly itself—a tower, perhaps, of which the very shape was wicked. So these figures seemed to stand up, violent and unaccountable, against an ultimate horizon, visions from the verge. The ends of the earth were closing in.

Talk had been going on steadily as he took in the scene; and not the least of the contrasts of that bewildering breakfast-table was the contrast between the easy and unobtrusive tone of talk and its terrible purport. They were deep in the discussion of an actual and immediate plot. The waiter downstairs had spoken quite correctly when he said that they were talking about bombs and kings. Only three days afterwards the Czar was to meet the President of the French Republic in Paris, and over their bacon and eggs upon their sunny balcony these beaming gentlemen had decided how both should die. Even the instrument was chosen; the black-bearded Marquis, it appeared, was to carry the bomb.

Ordinarily speaking, the proximity of this positive and objective crime would have sobered Syme, and cured him of all his merely mystical tremors. He would have thought of nothing but the need of saving at least two human bodies from being ripped in pieces with iron and roaring gas. But the truth was that by this time he had begun to feel a third kind of fear, more piercing and practical than either his moral revulsion or his social responsibility. Very simply, he had no fear to spare for the French President or the Czar; he had begun to fear for himself. Most of the talkers took little heed of him, debating now with their faces closer together, and almost uniformly grave, save when for an instant the smile of the Secretary ran aslant

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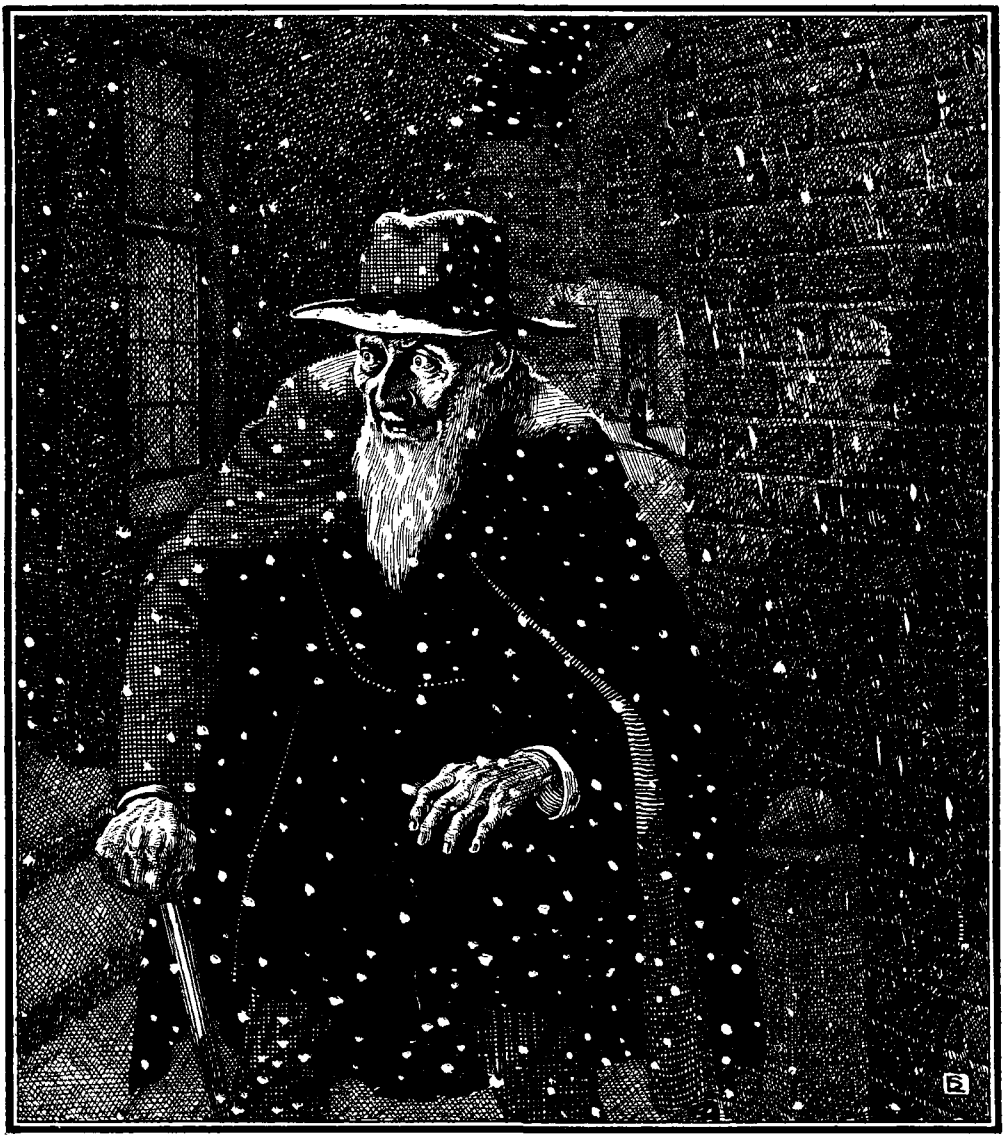

Symes knew the old man's evil figure was close upon him—and he turned to see his ghastly face

across his face as the jagged lightning runs aslant across the sky. But there was one persistent thing which first troubled Syme and at last terrified him. The President was always looking at him, steadily, and with a great and baffling interest. The enormous man was quite quiet, but his blue eyes stood out of his head. And they were always fixed on Syme.

Syme felt moved to spring up and leap over the balcony. When the President's eyes were on him he felt as if he were made of glass. He had hardly the shred of a doubt that in some silent and extraordinary way Sunday had found out that he was a spy. He looked over the edge of the balcony, and saw a policeman standing abstractedly just beneath, staring at the bright railings and the sunlit trees.

Then there fell upon him the great temptation that was to torment him for many days. In the presence of these powerful and repulsive men, who were the princes of anarchy, he had almost

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forgotten the frail and fanciful figure of the poet Gregory, the mere aesthete of anarchism. He even thought of him now with an old kindness, as if they had played together when children. But he remembered that he was still tied to Gregory by a great promise. He had promised never to do the very thing that he now felt himself almost in the act of doing. He had promised not to jump over that balcony and speak to that policeman. He took his cold hand off the cold stone balustrade. His soul swayed in a vertigo of moral indecision. He had only to snap the thread of a rash vow made to a villainous society, and all his life could be as open and sunny as the square beneath him. He had, on the other hand, only to keep his antiquated honour, and be delivered inch by inch into the power of this great enemy of mankind, whose very intellect was a torture-chamber. Whenever he looked down into the square he saw the comfortable policeman, a pillar of common-sense and common order. Whenever he looked back at the breakfast table he saw the President still quietly studying him with big, unbearable eyes.

IN ALL the torrent of his thought there were two thoughts that never crossed his mind. First, it never occurred to him to doubt that the President and his Council could crush him if he continued to stand alone. The place might be public, the project might seem impossible. But Sunday was not the man who would carry himself thus easily without having, somehow or somewhere, set open his iron trap. Either by anonymous poison or sudden street accident, by hypnotism or by fire from hell, Sunday could certainly strike him. If he defied the man he was probably dead, either struck stiff there in his chair or long afterwards as by an innocent ailment. If he called in the police promptly, arrested every one, told all, and set against them the whole energy of England, he would probably escape; certainly not otherwise. They were a balconyful of gentlemen overlooking a bright and busy square; but he felt no more safe with them than if they had been a boatful of armed pirates overlooking an empty sea.

There was a second thought that never came to him. It never occurred to him to be spiritually won over to the enemy. Many moderns, inured to a weak worship of intellect and force, might have wavered in their allegiance under this oppression of a great personality. They might have called Sunday the superman. If any such creature be conceivable, he looked, indeed, somewhat like it, with his earth-shaking abstraction, as of a stone statue walking. He might have been called something above man, with his large plans, which were too obvious to be detected, with his large face, which was too frank to be understood. But this was a kind of modern meanness to which Syme could not sink even in his extreme morbidity. Like any man, he was coward enough to fear great force; but he was not quite coward enough to admire it.

The men were eating as they talked, and even in this they were typical. Dr. Bull and the Marquis ate casually and conventionally of the best things on the table—cold pheasant or Strasbourg pie. But the Secretary was a vegetarian, and he spoke earnestly of the projected murder over half a raw tomato and three quarters of a glass of tepid water. The old Professor had such slops as suggested a sickening second childhood. And even in this President Sunday preserved his curious predominance of mere mass. For he ate like twenty men; he ate incredibly, with a frightful freshness of appetite, so that it was like watching a sausage factory. Yet continually, when he had swallowed a dozen crumpets or drunk a quart of coffee, he would be found with his great head on one side staring at Syme.

"I have often wondered," said the Marquis, taking a great bite out of a slice of bread and jam, "whether it wouldn't be better for me to do it with a knife. Most of the best things have been brought off with a knife. And it would be a new emotion to get a knife into a French President and wriggle it round."

"You are wrong," said the Secretary, drawing his black brows together. "The knife was merely the expression of the old personal quarrel with a personal tyrant. Dynamite is not only our best tool, but our best symbol. It is as perfect a symbol of us as is incense of the prayers of the Christians. It expands; it only destroys because it broadens; even so, thought only destroys because it broadens. A man's brain is a bomb," he cried out, loosening suddenly his strange passion and striking his own skull with violence. "My brain feels like a bomb, night and day. It must expand! It must expand! A man's brain must expand, if it breaks up the universe."

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"I don't want the universe broken up just yet," drawled the Marquis. "I want to do a lot of beastly things before I die. I thought of one yesterday in bed."

"No, if the only end of the thing is nothing," said Dr. Bull with his sphinx-like smile, "it hardly seems worth doing."

The old Professor was staring at the ceiling with dull eyes.

"Every man knows in his heart," he said, "that nothing is worth doing."

There was a singular silence, and then the Secretary said—

"We are wandering, however, from the point. The only question is how Wednesday is to strike the blow. I take it we should all agree with the original notion of a bomb. As to the actual arrangements, I should suggest that to-morrow morning he should go first of all to—"

The speech was broken off short under a vast shadow. President Sunday had risen to his feet, seeming to fill the sky above them.

"Before we discuss that," he said in a small, quiet voice, "let us go into a private room. I have something very particular to say."

SYME stood up before any of the others. The instant of choice had come at last, the pistol was at his head. On the pavement below he could hear the policeman idly stir and stamp, for the morning, though bright, was cold.

A barrel-organ in the street suddenly sprang with a jerk into a jovial tune. Syme stood up taut, as if it had been a bugle before the battle. He found himself filled with a supernatural courage that came from nowhere. That jingling music seemed full of the vivacity, the vulgarity, and the irrational valour of the poor, who in all those unclean streets were all clinging to the decencies and the charities of Christendom. His youthful prank of being a policeman had faded from his mind; he did not think of himself as the representative of the corps of gentlemen turned into fancy constables, or of the old eccentric who lived in the dark room. But he did feel himself as the ambassador of all these common and kindly people in the street, who every day marched into battle to the music of the barrel-organ. And this high pride in being human had lifted him unaccountably to an infinite height above the monstrous men around him. For an instant, at least, he looked down upon all their sprawling eccentricities from the starry pinnacle of the commonplace. He felt towards them all that unconscious and elementary superiority that a brave man feels over powerful beasts or a wise man over powerful errors. He knew that he had neither the intellectual nor the physical strength of President Sunday; but in that moment he minded it no more than the fact that he had not the muscles of a tiger or a horn on his nose like a rhinoceros. All was swallowed up in an ultimate certainty that the President was wrong and that the barrel-organ was right. There clanged in his mind that unanswerable and terrible truism in the song of Roland—

"Païens ont tort et Chrétiens ont droit,"

which in the old nasal French has the clang and groan of great iron. This liberation of his spirt from the load of his weakness went with a quite clear decision to embrace death. If the people of the barrel-organ could keep their old-world obligations, so could he. This very pride in keeping his word was that he was keeping it to miscreants. It was his last triumph over these lunatics to go down into their dark room and die for something that they could not even understand. The barrel-organ seemed to give the marching tune with the energy and the mingled noises of a whole orchestra; and he could hear deep and rolling, under all the trumpets of the pride of life, the drums of the pride of death.

The conspirators were already filing through the open window and into the rooms behind. Syme went last, outwardly calm, but with all his brain and body throbbing with romantic rhythm. The President led them down an irregular side stair, such as might be used by servants, and into a dim, cold, empty room, with a table and benches, like an abandoned board-room. When they were all in, he closed and locked the door.

The first to speak was Gogol, the irreconcilable, who seemed bursting with inarticulate grievance.

"Zso! Zso!" he cried, with an obscure excitement, his heavy Polish accent becoming almost impenetrable. "You zay you nod 'ide. You zay you show himselves. It is all nuzzinks. Ven you vant talk importance you run in a dark box!"

The President seemed to take the foreigner's incoherent satire with entire good humour.

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"You can't get hold of it yet, Gogol," he said in a fatherly way. "When once they have heard us talking nonsense on that balcony they will not care where we go afterwards. If we had come here first, we should have had the whole staff at the keyhole. You don't seem to know anything about mankind."

"I die for zem," cried the Pole in thick excitement, "and I slay zare oppressors. I care not for these games of gonzealment. I would zmite ze tyrant in ze open square."

"I see, I see," said the President, nodding kindly as he seated himself at the top of a long table. "You die for mankind first, and then you get up and smite their oppressors. So that's all right. And now may I ask you to control your beautiful sentiments, and sit down with the other gentlemen at this table. For the first time this morning something intelligent is going to be said."

SYME, with the perturbed promptitude he had shown since the original summons, sat down first. Gogol sat down last, grumbling in his brown beard about gombromise. No one except Syme seemed to have any notion of the blow that was about to fall. As for him, he had merely the feeling of a man mounting the scaffold with the intention, at any rate, of making a good speech.

"Comrades," said the President, suddenly rising, "we have spun out this farce long enough. I have called you down here to tell you something so simple and shocking that even the waiters up-stairs (long inured to our levities) might hear some new seriousness in my voice. Comrades, we were discussing plans and naming places. I propose, before saying anything else, that those plans and places should not be voted by this meeting, but should be left wholly in the control of some one reliable member. I suggest Comrade Saturday, Dr. Bull."

They all stared at him; then they all started in their seats, for the next words, though not loud, had a living and sensational emphasis. Sunday struck the table.

"Not one word more about the plans and places must be said at this meeting. Not one tiny detail more about what we mean to do must be mentioned in this company."

Sunday had spent his life in astonishing his followers; but it seemed as if he had never really astonished them until now. They all moved feverishly in their seats, except Syme. He sat stiff in his, with his hand in his pocket, and on the handle of his loaded revolver. When the attack on him came he would sell his life dear.

He would find out at least if the President was mortal.

Sunday went on smoothly—

"You will probably understand that there is only one possible motive for forbidding free speech at this festival of freedom. Strangers overhearing us matters nothing. They assume that we are joking. But what would matter, even unto death, is this, that there should be one actually among us who is not of us, who knows our grave purpose, but does not share it, who—"

The Secretary screamed out suddenly like a woman.

"It can't be!" he cried, leaping. "There can't—"

The President flapped his large flat hand on the table like the fin of some huge fish.

"Yes," he said slowly, "there is a spy in this room. There is a traitor at this table. I will waste no more words. His name—"

Syme half rose from his seat, his finger firm on the trigger.

"His name is Gogol," said the President. "He is that hairy humbug over there who pretends to be a Pole."

Gogol sprang to his feet, a pistol in each hand. With the same flash three men sprang at his throat. Even the Professor made an effort to rise. But Syme saw little of the scene, for he was blinded with a beneficent darkness; he had sunk down into his seat shuddering, in a palsy of passionate relief.

CHAPTER VII

THE UNACCOUNTABLE CONDUCT OF PROFESSOR DE WORMS

"SIT DOWN!" said Sunday in a voice that he used once or twice in his life, a voice that made men drop drawn swords.

The three who had risen fell away from Gogol, and that equivocal person himself resumed his seat.

"Well, my man," said the President briskly, addressing him as one addresses a total stranger, "will you oblige me by putting your hand in your upper waistcoat pocket and showing me what you have there?"

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The alleged Pole was a little pale under his tangle of dark hair, but he put two fingers into the pocket with apparent coolness and pulled out a blue strip of card. When Syme saw it lying on the table, he woke up again to the world outside him. For although the card lay at the other extreme of the table, and he could read nothing of the inscription on it, it bore a startling resemblance to the blue card in his own pocket, the card which had been given to him when he joined the anti-anarchist constabulary.

"Pathetic Slav," said the President, are you prepared in the presence of that card to deny that you are in this company—shall we say *de trop?*"

"Right oh!" said the late Gogol. It made every one jump to hear a clear, commercial and somewhat cockney voice coming out of that forest of foreign hair. It was irrational, as if a Chinaman had suddenly spoken with a Scotch accent.

"I gather that you fully understand your position," said Sunday.

"You bet," answered the Pole. "I see it's a fair cop. All I say is, I don't believe any Pole could have imitated my accent like I did his."

"I concede the point," said Sunday. "I believe your own accent to be inimitable, though I shall practice it in my bath. Do you mind leaving your beard with your card?"

"Not a bit," answered Gogol; and with one finger he ripped off the whole of his shaggy head-covering, emerging with thin red hair and a pale, pert face. "It was hot," he added.

"I will do you the justice to say," said Sunday, not without a sort of brutal admiration, "that you seem to have kept pretty cool under it. Now listen to me. I like you. The consequence is that it would annoy me for just about two and a half minutes if I heard that you had died in torments. Well, if you ever tell the police or any human soul about us, I shall have that two and a half minutes of discomfort. On your discomfort I will not dwell. Good-day. Mind the step."

The red-haired detective who had masqueraded as Gogol rose to his feet without a word, and walked out of the room with an air of perfect nonchalance. Yet the astonished Syme was able to realise that this ease was suddenly assumed; for there was a slight stumble outside the door, which showed that the departing detective had not minded the step.

"Time is flying," said the President in his gayest manner, after glancing at his watch, which like everything about him seemed bigger than it ought to be. "I must get off at once; I have to take the chair at a Humanitarian meeting."

The Secretary turned to him with working eyebrows.

"Would it not be better," he said a little sharply, "to discuss further the details of our project, now that the spy has left us?"

"No, I think not," said the President with a yawn like an unobtrusive earthquake. "Leave it as it is. Let Saturday settle it. I must be off. Breakfast here next Sunday."

But the late loud scenes had whipped up the almost naked nerves of the Secretary.

He was one of those men who are conscientious even in crime.

"I must protest, President, that the thing is irregular," he said. "It is a fundamental rule of our society that all plans shall be debated in full council. Of course, I fully appreciate your forethought when in the actual presence of a traitor—"

"Secretary," said the President seriously, "if you'd take your head home and boil it for a turnip it might be useful. I can't say. But it might."

The Secretary reared back in a kind of equine anger.

"I really fail to understand—" he began in high offence.

"That's it, that's it," said the President, nodding a great many times. "That's where you fail right enough. You fail to understand. Why, you dancing donkey," he roared, rising, "you didn't want to be overheard by a spy, didn't you? How do you know you aren't overheard now?"

And with these words he shouldered his way out of the room, shaking with incomprehensible scorn.

FOUR of the men left behind gaped after him without any apparent glimmering of his meaning. Syme alone had even a glimmering, and such as it was it froze him to the bone. If the last words of the President meant anything, they meant that he had not after all passed unsuspected. They meant that while Sunday could not denounce him like Gogol, he still could not trust him like the others.

The other four got to their feet grumbling more or less, and betook themselves

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elsewhere to find lunch, for it was already well past midday. The Professor went last, very slowly and painfully. Syme sat long after the rest had gone, revolving his strange position. He had escaped a thunderbolt, but he was still under a cloud. At last he rose and made his way out of the hotel into Leicester Square. The bright, cold day had grown increasingly colder, and when he came out into the street he was surprised by a few flakes of snow. While he still carried the sword-stick and the rest of Gregory's portable luggage, he had thrown the cloak down and left it somewhere, perhaps on the steam-tug, perhaps on the balcony. Hoping, therefore, that the snow-shower might be slight, he stepped back out of the street for a moment and stood up under the doorway of a small and greasy hair-dresser's shop, the front window of which was empty, except for a sickly wax lady in evening dress.

Snow, however, began to thicken and fall fast; and Syme, having found one glance at the wax lady quite sufficient to depress his spirits, stared out instead into the white and empty street. He was considerably astonished to see, standing quite still outside the shop and staring into the window, a man. His top hat was loaded with snow like the hat of Father Christmas, the white drift was rising round his boots and ankles; but it seemed as if nothing could tear him away from the contemplation of the colourless wax doll in dirty evening dress. That any human being should stand in such weather looking into such a shop was a matter of sufficient wonder to Syme; but his idle wonder turned suddenly into a personal shock; for he realised that the man standing there was the paralytic old Professor de Worms. It scarcely seemed the place for a person of his years and infirmities.

Syme was ready to believe anything about the perversions of this dehumanised brotherhood; but even he could not believe that the Professor had fallen in love with that particular wax lady. He could only suppose that the man's malady (whatever it was) involved some momentary fits of rigidity or trance. He was not inclined, however, to feel in this case any very compassionate concern. On the contrary, he rather congratulated himself that the Professor's stroke and his elaborate and limping walk would make it easy to escape from him and leave him miles behind. For Syme thirsted first and last to get clear of the whole poisonous atmosphere, if only for an hour. Then he could collect his thoughts, formulate his policy, and decide finally whether he should or should not keep faith with Gregory.

He strolled away through the dancing snow, turned up two or three streets, down through two or three others, and entered a small Soho restaurant for lunch. He partook reflectively of four small and quaint courses, drank half a bottle of red wine, and ended up over black coffee and a black cigar, still thinking. He had taken his seat in the upper room of the restaurant, which was full of the chink of knives and the chatter of foreigners. He remembered that in old days he had imagined that all these harmless and kindly aliens were anarchists. He shuddered, remembering the real thing. But even the shudder had the delightful shame of escape. The wine, the common food, the familiar place, the faces of natural and talkative men, made him almost feel as if the Council of the Seven Days had been a bad dream; and although he knew it was nevertheless an objective reality, it was at least a distant one. Tall houses and populous streets lay between him and his last sight of the shameful seven; he was free in free London, and drinking wine among the free. With a somewhat easier action, he took his hat and stick and strolled down the stair into the shop below.

WHEN he entered that lower room he stood stricken and rooted to the spot. At a small table, close up to the blank window and the white street of snow, sat the old anarchist Professor over a glass of milk, with his lifted livid face and pendent eyelids. For an instant Syme stood as rigid as the stick he leant upon. Then with a gesture as of blind hurry, he brushed past the Professor, dashing open the door and slamming it behind him, and stood outside in the snow.

"Can that old corpse be following me?" he asked himself, biting his yellow moustache. "I stopped too long up in that room, so that even such leaden feet could catch me up. One comfort is, with a little brisk walking I can put a man like that as far away as Timbuctoo. Or am I too fanciful? Was he really following me? Surely Sunday would not be such a fool as to send a lame man?"

He set off at a smart pace, twisting and

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whirling his stick, in the direction of Covent Garden. As he crossed the great market the snow increased, growing blinding and bewildering as the afternoon began to darken. The snowflakes tormented him like a swarm of silver bees. Getting into his eyes and beard, they added their unremitting futility to his already irritated nerves; and by the time that he had come at a swinging pace to the beginning of Fleet Street, he lost patience, and finding a Sunday tea-shop, turned into it to take shelter. He ordered another cup of black coffee as an excuse. Scarcely had he done so, when Professor de Worms hobbled heavily into the shop, sat down with difficulty and ordered a glass of milk.

Syme's walking-stick had fallen from his hand with a great clang, which confessed the concealed steel. But the Professor did not look round. Syme, who was commonly a cool character, was literally gaping as a rustic gapes at a conjuring trick. He had seen no cab following; he had heard no wheels outside the shop; to all mortal appearances the man had come on foot. But the old man could only walk like a snail, and Syme had walked like the wind. He started up and snatched his stick, half crazy with the contradiction in mere arithmetic, and swung out of the swinging doors, leaving his coffee untasted. An omnibus going to the Bank went rattling by with an unusual rapidity. He had a violent run of a hundred yards to reach it; but he managed to spring, swaying upon the splash-board, and pausing for an instant to pant, he climbed on to the top. When he had been seated for about half a minute, he heard behind him a sort of heavy and asthmatic breathing.

Turning sharply, he saw rising gradually higher and higher up the omnibus steps a top hat soiled and dripping with snow, and under the shadow of its brim the short-sighted face and shaky shoulders of Professor de Worms. He let himself into a seat with characteristic care, and wrapped himself up to the chin in the mackintosh rug.

Every movement of the old man's tottering figure and vague hands, every uncertain gesture and panic-stricken pause, seemed to put it beyond question that he was helpless, that he was in the last imbecility of the body. He moved by inches, he let himself down with little gasps of caution. And yet, unless the philosophical entities called time and space have no vestige even of a practical existence, it appeared quite unquestionable that he had run after the omnibus.

Syme sprang erect upon the rocking car, and after staring wildly at the wintry sky, that grew gloomier every moment, he ran down the steps. He had repressed an elemental impulse to leap over the side.

Too bewildered to look back or to reason, he rushed into one of the little courts at the side of Fleet Street as a rabbit rushes into a hole. He had a vague idea, if this incomprehensible old Jack-in-the box was really pursuing him, that in that labyrinth of little streets he could soon throw him off the scent. He dived in and out of those crooked lanes, which were more like cracks than thoroughfares; and by the time that he had completed about twenty alternate angles and described an unthinkable polygon, he paused to listen for any sound of pursuit. There was none; there could not in any case have been much, for the little streets were thick with the soundless snow. Somewhere behind Red Lion Court, however, he noticed a place where some energetic citizen had cleared away the snow for a space of about twenty yards, leaving the wet, glistening cobblestones. He thought little of this as he passed it, only plunging into yet another arm of the maze. But when a few hundred yards farther on he stood still again to listen, his heart stood still also, for he heard from that space of rugged stones the clinking crutch and labouring feet of the infernal cripple.

The sky above was loaded with the clouds of snow, leaving London in a darkness and oppression premature for that hour of the evening. On each side of Syme the walls of the alley were blind and featureless; there was no little window or any kind of eye. He felt a new impulse to break out of this hive of houses, and to get once more into the open and lamp-lit street. Yet he rambled and dodged for a long time before he struck the main thoroughfare. When he did so, he struck it much farther up than he had fancied. He came out into what seemed the vast and void of Ludgate Circus, and saw St. Paul's Cathedral sitting in the sky.

AT FIRST he was startled to find these great roads so empty, as if a pestilence had swept through the city. Then he told himself that some degree of

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emptiness was natural; first because the snow-storm was even dangerously deep, and secondly because it was Sunday. And at the very word Sunday he bit his lip; the word was henceforth for him like some indecent pun. Under the white fog of snow high up in the heaven the whole atmosphere of the city was turned to a very queer kind of green twilight, as of men under the sea. The sealed and sullen sunset behind the dark dome of St. Paul's had in it smoky and sinister colours—colours of sickly green, dead red or decaying bronze, that were just bright enough to emphasise the solid whiteness of the snow. But right up against these dreary colours rose the black bulk of the cathedral; and upon the top of the cathedral was a random splash and great stain of snow, still clinging as to an Alpine peak. It had fallen accidentally, but just so fallen as to half drape the dome from its very topmost point, and to pick out in perfect silver the great orb and the cross. When Syme saw it he suddenly straightened himself, and made with his sword-stick an involuntary salute.

He knew that that evil figure, his shadow, was creeping quickly or slowly behind him, and he did not care. It seemed a symbol of human faith and valour that while the skies were darkening that high place of the earth was bright. The devils might have captured heaven, but they had not yet captured the cross. He had a new impulse to tear out the secret of this dancing, jumping and pursuing paralytic; and at the entrance of the court as it opened upon the Circus he turned, stick in hand, to face his pursuer.

Professor de Worms came slowly round the corner of the irregular alley behind him, his unnatural form outlined against a lonely gas-lamp, irresistibly recalling that very imaginative figure in the nursery rhymes, "the crooked man who went a crooked mile." He really looked as if he had been twisted out of shape by the tortuous streets he had been threading. He came nearer and nearer, the lamplight shining on his lifted spectacles, his lifted, patient face. Syme waited for him as St. George waited for the dragon, as a man waits for a final explanation or for death. And the old Professor came right up to him and passed him like a total stranger, without even a blink of his mournful eyelids.

There was something in this silent and unexpected innocence that left Syme in a final fury. The man's colourless face and manner seemed to assert that the whole following had been an accident. Syme was galvanised with an energy that was something between bitterness and a burst of boyish derision. He made a wild gesture as if to knock the old man's hat off, called out something like "Catch me if you can," and went racing away across the white, open Circus. Concealment was impossible now; and looking back over his shoulder, he could see the black figure of the old gentleman coming after him with long, swinging strides like a man winning a mile race. But the head upon that bounding body was still pale, grave and professional, like the head of a lecturer upon the body of a harlequin.

This outrageous chase sped across Ludgate Circus, up Ludgate Hill, round St. Paul's Cathedral, along Cheapside, Syme remembering all the nightmares he had ever known. Then Syme broke away towards the river, and ended almost down by the docks. He saw the yellow panes of a low, lighted public-house, flung himself into it and ordered beer. It was a foul tavern, sprinkled with foreign sailors, a place where opium might be smoked or knives drawn.

A moment later Professor de Worms entered the place, sat down carefully, and asked for a glass of milk.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PROFESSOR EXPLAINS

WHEN Gabriel Syme found himself finally established in a chair, and opposite to him, fixed and final also, the lifted eyebrows and leaden eyelids of the Professor, his fears fully returned. This incomprehensible man from the fierce council, after all, had certainly pursued him. If the man had one character as a paralytic and another character as a pursuer, the antithesis might make him more interesting, but scarcely more soothing. It would be a very small comfort that he could not find the Professor out, if by some serious accident the Professor should find him out. He emptied a whole pewter pot of ale before the Professor had touched his milk.

One possibility, however, kept him hopeful and yet helpless. It was just possible that this escapade signified something other than even a slight suspicion of him. Perhaps it was some regular form or sign. Perhaps the foolish scamper

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was some sort of friendly signal that he ought to have understood. Perhaps it was a ritual. Perhaps the new Thursday was always chased along Cheapside, as the new Lord Mayor is always escorted along it. He was just selecting a tentative inquiry, when the old Professor opposite suddenly and simply cut him short. Before Syme could ask the first diplomatic question, the old anarchist had asked suddenly, without any sort of preparation—

"Are you a policeman?"

Whatever else Syme had expected, he had never expected anything so brutal and actual as this. Even his great presence of mind could only manage a reply with an air of rather blundering jocularity.

"A policeman?" he said, laughing vaguely. "Whatever made you think of a policeman in connection with me?"

"The process was simple enough," answered the Professor patiently. "I thought you looked like a policeman. I think so now."

"Did I take a policeman's hat by mistake out of the restaurant?" asked Syme, smiling wildly. "Have I by any chance got a number stuck on to me somewhere? Have my boots got that watchful look? Why must I be a policeman? Do, do let me be a postman."

The old Professor shook his head with a gravity that gave no hope, but Syme ran on with a feverish irony.

"But perhaps I misunderstood the delicacies of your German philosophy. Perhaps policeman is a relative term. In an evolutionary sense, sir, the ape fades so gradually into the policeman, that I myself can never detect the shade. The monkey is only the policeman that may be. Perhaps a maiden lady on Clapham Common is only the policeman that might have been. I don't mind being the policeman that might have been. I don't mind being anything in German thought."

"Are you in the police service?" said the old man, ignoring all Syme's improvised and desperate raillery. "Are you a detective?"

Syme's heart turned to stone, but his face never changed.

"Your suggestion is ridiculous," he began. "Why on earth—"

The old man struck his palsied hand passionately on the rickety table, nearly breaking it.

"Did you hear me ask a plain question, you paltering spy?" he shrieked in a high, crazy voice. "Are you, or are you not, a police detective?"

"No!" answered Syme, like a man standing on the hangman's drop.

"You swear it," said the old man, leaning across to him, his dead face becoming as it were loathsomely alive. "You swear it! You swear it! If you swear falsely, will you be damned? Will you be sure that the devil dances at your funeral? Will you see that the nightmare sits on your grave? Will there really be no mistake? You are an anarchist, you are a dynamiter! Above all, you are not in any sense a detective? You are not in the British police?"

He leant his angular elbow far across the table, and put up his large loose hand like a flap to his ear.

"I am not in the British police," said Syme with insane calm.

Professor de Worms fell back in his chair with a curious air of collapse.

"That's a pity," he said, "because I am."

Syme sprang up straight, sending back the bench behind him with a crash.

"Because you are what?" he said thickly. "You are what?"

"I am a policeman," said the Professor with his first broad smile, and beaming through his spectacles. "But as you think policeman only a relative term, of course I have nothing to do with you. I am in the British police force; but as you tell me you are not in the British police force, I can only say that I met you in a dynamiter's club. I suppose I ought to arrest you." And with these words he laid on the table before Syme an exact facsimile of the blue card which Syme had in his own waistcoat pocket, the symbol of his power from the police.

SYME had for a flash the sensation that the cosmos had turned exactly upside down, that all trees were growing downwards and that all stars were under his feet. Then came slowly the opposite conviction. For the last twenty-four hours the cosmos had really been upside down, but now the capsized universe had come right side up again. This devil from who he had been fleeing all day was only an elder brother of his own house, who on the other side of the table lay back and laughed at him. He did not for the moment ask any questions of detail; he only knew the happy and silly fact that this shadow, which had pursued him with an intolerable

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oppression of peril, was only the shadow of a friend trying to catch him up. He knew simultaneously that he was a fool and a free man. For with any recovery from morbidity there must go a certain healthy humiliation. There comes a certain point in such conditions when only three things are possible: first a perpetuation of Satanic pride, secondly tears, and third laughter. Syme's egotism held hard to the first course for a few seconds, and then suddenly adopted the third. Taking his own blue police ticket from his own waistcoat pocket, he tossed it onto the table; then he flung his head back until his spike of yellow beard almost pointed at the ceiling, and shouted with a barbaric laughter.

Even in that close den, perpetually filled with the din of knives, plates, cans, clamorous voices, sudden struggles and stampedes, there was something Homeric in Syme's mirth which made many half-drunken men look round.

"What yer laughing at, guv-nor?" asked one wondering labourer from the docks.

"At myself," answered Syme, and went off again into the agony of his ecstatic reaction.

"Pull yourself together," said the Professor, "or you'll get hysterical. Have some more beer. I'll join you."

"You haven't drunk your milk," said Syme.

"My milk!" said the other, in tones of withering and unfathomable contempt, "my milk! Do you think I'd look at the beastly stuff when I'm out of sight of the bloody anarchists? We're all Christians in this room, though perhaps," he added, glancing around at the reeling crowd, "not strict ones. Finish my milk? Great blazes! yes, I'll finish it right enough!" and he knocked the tumbler off the table, making a crash of glass and a splash of silver fluid.

Syme was staring at him with a happy curiosity.

"I understand now," he cried; "of course, you're not an old man at all."

"I can't take my face off here," replied Professor de Worms. "It's rather an elaborate make-up. As to whether I'm an old man, that's not for me to say. I was thirty-eight last birthday."

"Yes, but I mean," said Syme impatiently, "there's nothing the matter with you."

"Yes," answered the other dispassionately, "I am subject to colds."

Syme's laughter at all this had about it a wild weakness of relief. He laughed at the idea of the paralytic Professor being really a young actor dressed up as if for the footlights.

But he felt that he would have laughed as loudly if a pepperpot had merely fallen over.

The false Professor drank and wiped his false beard.

"Did you know," he asked, "that that man Gogol was one of us?"

"I? No, I didn't know it," answered Syme in some surprise. "But didn't you?"

"I knew no more than the dead," replied the man who called himself de Worms. "I thought the President was talking about me, and I rattled in my boots."

"And I thought he was talking about me," said Syme, with his rather reckless laughter. "I had my hand on my revolver all the time."

"So had I," said the Professor grimly; "so had Gogol evidently."

Syme struck the table with an exclamation.

"Why, there were three of us there!" he cried. "Three out of seven is a fighting number. If we had only known that we were three!"

THE face of Professor de Worms darkened, and he did not look up.

"We were three," he said. "If we had been three hundred we could still have done nothing."

"Not if we were three hundred against four?" asked Syme, jeering rather boisterously.

"No," said the Professor with sobriety, "not if we were three hundred against Sunday."

And the mere name struck Syme cold and serious; his laughter had died in his heart before it could die on his lips. The face of the unforgettable President sprang into his mind as startling as a coloured photograph, and he remarked this difference between Sunday and all his satellites, that their faces, however fierce or sinister, became gradually blurred by memory like other human faces, whereas Sunday's seemed almost to grow more actual during absence, as if a man's painted portrait should slowly come alive.

They were both silent for a measure of moments, and then Syme's speech came with a rush, like the sudden foaming of champagne.

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"Professor," he cried, "it is intolerable. Are you afraid of this man?"

The Professor lifted his heavy lids, and gazed at Syme with large, wide-open, blue eyes of an almost ethereal honesty.

"Yes, I am," he said mildly. "So are you."

Syme was dumb for an instant. Then he rose to his feet erect, and thrust the chair away from him.

"Yes," he said in a voice indescribable, "you are right. I am afraid of him. Therefore I swear by God that I will seek out this man whom I fear until I find him, and strike him on the mouth. If heaven were his throne and the earth his footstool, I swear that I would pull him down."

"How?" asked the staring Professor. "Why?"

"Because I am afraid of him," said Syme; "and no man should leave in the universe anything of which he is afraid."

De Worms blinked at him with a sort of blind wonder. He made an effort to speak, but Syme went on in a low voice, but with an undercurrent of inhuman exaltation—

"Who would condescend to strike down the mere things that he does not fear? Who would debase himself to be merely brave, like any common prize-fighter? Who would stoop to be fearless—like a tree? Fight the thing that you fear. You remember the old tale of the English clergyman who gave the last rites to the brigand of Sicily, and how on his deathbed the great robber said, 'I can give you no money, but I can give you advice for a lifetime: your thumb on the blade, and strike upwards.' So I say to you, strike upwards, if you strike at the stars."

The other looked at the ceiling, one of the tricks of his pose.

"Sunday is a fixed star," he said.

"You shall see him a falling star," said Syme, and put on his hat.

The decision of his gesture drew the Professor vaguely to his feet.

"Have you any idea," he asked, with a sort of benevolent bewilderment, "exactly where you are going?"

"Yes," replied Syme shortly, "I am going to prevent this bomb being thrown in Paris."

"Have you any conception how?" inquired the other.

"No," said Syme with equal decision.

"You remember, of course," resumed the soidisant de Worms, pulling his beard and looking out of the window, "that when we broke up rather hurriedly the whole arrangements for the atrocity were left in the private hands of the Marquis and Dr. Bull. The Marquis is by this time probably crossing the Channel. But where he will go and what he will do it is doubtful whether even the President knows; certainly we don't. The only man who does know is Dr. Bull."

"Confound it!" cried Syme. "And we don't know where he is."

"Yes," said the other in his curious, absent-minded way, "I know where he is myself."

"Will you tell me?" asked Syme with eager eyes.

"I will take you there," said the Professor, and took down his own hat from a peg.

Syme stood looking at him with a sort of rigid excitement.

"What do you mean?" he asked sharply. "Will you join me? Will you take the risk?"

"Young man," said the Professor pleasantly, "I am amused to observe that you think I am a coward. As to that I will say only one word, and that shall be entirely in the manner of your own philosophical rhetoric. You think that it is possible to pull down the President. I know that it is impossible, and I am going to try it," and opening the tavern door, which let in a blast of bitter air, they went out together into the dark streets by the docks.

MOST of the snow was melted or trampled to mud, but here and there a clot of it still showed grey rather than white in the gloom. The small streets were sloppy and full of pools, which reflected the flaming lamps irregularly, and by accident, like fragments of some other and fallen world. Syme felt almost dazed as he stepped through this growing confusion of lights and shadows; but his companion walked on with a certain briskness towards where, at the end of the street, an inch or two of the lamplit river looked like a bar of flame.

"Where are you going?" Syme inquired.

"Just now," answered the Professor, "I am going just round the corner to see whether Dr. Bull has gone to bed. He is hygienic, and retires early."

"Dr. Bull!" exclaimed Syme. "Does he live round the corner?"

"No," answered his friend. "As a matter of fact he lives some way off, on the other side of the river, but we can tell from

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here whether he has gone to bed."

Turning the corner as he spoke, and facing the dim river, flecked with flame, he pointed with his stick to the other bank. On the Surrey side at this point there ran out into the Thames, seeming almost to overhang it, a bulk and cluster of those tall tenements, dotted with lighted windows, and rising like factory chimneys to an almost insane height. Their special poise and position made one block of buildings especially look like a Tower of Babel with a hundred eyes. Syme had never seen any of the sky-scraping buildings in America, so he could only think of the buildings in a dream.

Even as he stared, the highest light in this innumerably lighted turret abruptly went out, as if this black Argus had winked at him with one of his innumerable eyes.

Professor de Worms swung round on his heel, and struck his stick against his boot.

"We are too late," he said, "the hygienic Doctor has gone to bed."

"What do you mean?" asked Syme. "Does he live over there, then?"

"Yes," said de Worms, "behind that particular window which you can't see. Come along and get some dinner. We must call on him tomorrow morning."

Without further parley, he led the way through several by-ways until they came out into the flare and clamour of the East India Dock Road. The Professor, who seemed to know his way about the neighbourhood, proceeded to a place where the line of lighted shops fell back into a sort of abrupt twilight and quiet, in which an old white inn, all out of repair, stood back some twenty feet from the road.

"You can find good English inns left by accident everywhere, like fossils," explained the Professor. "I once found a decent place in the West End."

"I suppose," said Syme, smiling, "that this is the corresponding decent place in the East End?"

"It is," said the Professor reverently, and went in. In that place they dined and slept, both very thoroughly. The beans and bacon, which these unaccountable people cooked well, the astonishing emergence of Burgundy from their cellars, crowned Syme's sense of a new comradeship and comfort. Through all this ordeal his root horror had been isolation, and there are no words to express the abyss between isolation and having one ally. It may be conceded to the mathematicians that four is twice two. But two is not twice one; two is two thousand times one. That is why, in spite of a hundred disadvantages, the world will always return to monogamy.

Syme was able to pour out for the first time the whole of his outrageous tale, from the time when Gregory had taken him to the little tavern by the river. He did it idly and amply, in a luxuriant monologue, as a man speaks with very old friends. On his side, also, the man who had impersonated Professor de Worms was not less communicative. His own story was almost as silly as Syme's.

"That's a good get-up of yours," said Syme, draining a glass of Macon; "a lot better than old Gogol's. Even at the start I thought he was a bit too hairy."

"A difference of artistic theory," replied the Professor pensively. "Gogol was an idealist. He made up as the abstract or platonic ideal of an anarchist. But I am a realist. I am a portrait painter. But, indeed, to say that I am a portrait painter is an inadequate expression. I am a portrait."

"I don't understand you," said Syme.

"I am a portrait," repeated the Professor. "I am a portrait of the celebrated Professor de Worms, who is, I believe, in Naples."

"YOU mean you are made up like him," said Syme. "But doesn't he know that you are taking his nose in vain?"

"He knows it right enough," replied his friend cheerfully.

"Then why doesn't he denounce you?"

"I have denounced him," answered the Professor.

"Do explain yourself," said Syme.

"With pleasure, if you don't mind hearing my story," replied the eminent foreign philosopher. "I am by profession an actor, and my name is Wilks. When I was on the stage I mixed with all sorts of Bohemian and blackguard company. Sometimes I touched the edge of the turf, sometimes the riffraff of the arts, and occasionally the political refugee. In some den of exiled dreamers I was introduced to the great German Nihilist philosopher, Professor de Worms. I did not gather much about him beyond his appearance, which was very disgusting, and which I studied carefully. I understood that he had proved that the destructive principle in the universe was God; hence

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Half-mad, Syme thrust, and made what should have been a bloody scar on the Marquis's cheek. But there was no scar.

he insisted on the need for a furious and incessant energy, rending all things in pieces. Energy, he said, was the All. He was lame, short-sighted, and partially paralytic. When I met him I was in a frivolous mood, and I disliked him so much that I resolved to imitate him. If I had been a draughtsman I would have drawn a caricature. I was only an actor, I could only act a caricature. I made myself up into what was meant for a wild exaggeration of the old Professor's dirty old self. When I went into the room full of his supporters I expected to be received with a roar of laughter, or (if they were too far gone) with a roar of indignation at the insult. I cannot describe the surprise I felt when my entrance was received with a respectful silence, followed (when I had first opened my lips) with a murmur of admiration. The curse of the perfect artist had fallen upon me. I had been too subtle, I had been too true. They thought I really was the great Nihilist Professor. I was a healthy-minded young man at the time, and I confess that it was a blow. Before I could fully recover, however, two or three of these admirers ran up to me radiating indignation, and told me that a public insult had been put upon me in the next room. I inquired its nature. It seemed that an impertinent fellow had dressed himself up as a preposterous parody of myself. I had drunk more champagne than was good for me, and in a flash of folly I decided to see the situation through. Consequently it was to meet the glare of the company and my own lifted eyebrows and freezing eyes that the real Professor came into the room.

"I need hardly say there was a collision. The pessimists all round me looked anxiously from one Professor to the other Professor to see which was really the more feeble. But I won. An old man in poor health, like my rival, could not be expected to be so impressively feeble as a young actor in the prime of life. You see, he really had paralysis, and working within this definite limitation, he couldn't be so jolly paralytic as I was. Then he tried to blast my claims intel-

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lectually. I countered that by a very simple dodge. Whenever he said something nobody but he could understand, I replied with something which I could not even understand myself. 'I don't fancy,' he said, 'that you could have worked out the principle that evolution is only negation, since there inheres in it the introduction of lacunæ, which are an essential of differentiation.' I replied quite scornfully, 'You read all that up in Pinckwerts; the notion that involution functioned eugenically was exposed long ago by Glumpe.' It is unnecessary for me to say that there never were such people as Pinckwerts and Glumpe. But people all round (rather to my surprise) seemed to remember them quite well, and the Professor, finding that the learned and mysterious method left him rather at the mercy of an enemy slightly deficient in scruples, fell back upon a more popular form of wit. 'I see,' he sneered, 'you prevail like the false pig in Æsop.' 'And you fail,' I answered, smiling, 'like the hedgehog in Montaigne.' Need I say that there is no hedgehog in Montaigne? 'Your claptrap comes off,' he said; 'so would your beard.' I had no intelligent answer to this, which was quite true and rather witty. But I laughed heartily, answered, 'Like the Pantheist's boots,' at random, and turned on my heel with all the honours of victory. The real Professor was thrown out, but not with violence, though one man tried very patiently to pull off his nose. He is now, I believe, received everywhere in Europe as a delightful impostor. His apparent earnestness and anger you see, make him all the more entertaining."

"Well," said Syme, "I can understand your putting on his dirty old beard for a night's practical joke, but I don't understand your never taking it off again."

"That is the rest of the story," said the impersonator. "When I myself left the company, followed by reverent applause, I went limping down the dark street, hoping that I should soon be far enough away to be able to walk like a human being. To my astonishment, as I was turning the corner, I felt a touch on the shoulder, and turning, found myself under the shadow of an enormous policeman. He told me I was wanted. I struck a sort of paralytic attitude, and cried in a high German accent, 'Yes, I am wanted —by the oppressed of the world. You are arresting me on the charge of being the great anarchist, Professor de Worms.' The policeman impassively consulted a paper in his hand. 'No, sir,' he said civilly, 'at least, not exactly, sir. I am arresting you on the charge of not being the celebrated anarchist, Professor de Worms.' This charge, if it was criminal at all, was certainly the lighter of the two, and I went along with the man, doubtful, but not greatly dismayed. I was shown into a number of rooms, and eventually into the presence of a police officer, who explained that a serious campaign had been opened against the centres of anarchy, and that this, my successful masquerade, might be of considerable value to the public safety. He offered me a good salary and this little blue card. Though our conversation was short, he struck me as a man of very massive common sense and humour; but I cannot tell you much about him personally, because—"

Syme laid down his knife and fork.

"I know," he said, "because you talked to him in a dark room."

Professor de Worms nodded and drained his glass.

CHAPTER IX

THE MAN IN SPECTACLES

"BURGUNDY is a jolly thing," said the Professor sadly, as he set his glass down.

"You don't look as if it were," said Syme; "you drink it as if it were medicine."

"You must excuse my manner," said the Professor dismally, "my position is rather a curious one. Inside I am really bursting with boyish merriment; but I acted the paralytic Professor so well, that now I can't leave off. So that when I am among friends, and have no need at all to disguise myself, I still can't help speaking slow and wrinkling my forehead —just as if it were my forehead. I can be quite happy, you understand, but only in a paralytic sort of way. The most buoyant exclamations leap up in my heart, but they come out of my mouth quite different. You should hear me say, 'Buck up, old cock!' It would bring tears to your eyes."

"It does," said Syme; "but I cannot help thinking that apart from all that you are really a bit worried."

The Professor started a little and looked at him steadily.

"You are a very clever fellow," he said,

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"it is a pleasure to work with you. Yes, I have rather a heavy cloud in my head. There is a great problem to face," and he sank his bald brow in his two hands.

Then he said in a low voice—

"Can you play the piano?"

"Yes," said Syme in simple wonder, "I'm supposed to have a good touch."

Then, as the other did not speak, he added—

"I trust the great cloud is lifted."

After a long silence, the Professor said out of the cavernous shadow of his hands—

"It would have done just as well if you could work a typewriter."

"Thank you," said Syme, "you flatter me."

"Listen to me," said the other, "and remember whom we have to see tomorrow. You and I are going tomorrow to attempt something which is very much more dangerous than trying to steal the Crown Jewels out of the Tower. We are trying to steal a secret from a very sharp, very strong, and very wicked man. I believe there is no man, except the President, of course, who is so seriously startling and formidable as that little grinning fellow in goggles. He has not perhaps the white-hot enthusiasm unto death, the mad martyrdom for anarchy, which marks the Secretary. But then that very fanaticism in the Secretary has a human pathos, and is almost a redeeming trait. But the little Doctor has a brutal sanity that is more shocking than the Secetary's disease. Don't you notice his detestable virility and vitality. He bounces like an India-rubber ball. Depend on it, Sunday was not asleep (I wonder if he ever sleeps?) when he locked up all the plans of this outrage in the round, black head of Dr. Bull."

"And you think," said Syme, "that this unique monster will be soothed if I play the piano to him?"

"Don't be an ass," said his mentor. "I mentioned the piano because it gives one quick and independent fingers. Syme, if we are to go through this interview and come out sane or alive, we must have some code of signals between us that this brute will not see. I have made a rough alphabetical cypher corresponding to the five fingers—like this, see," and he rippled with his fingers on the wooden table—"B A D, bad, a word we may frequently require."

Syme poured himself out another glass of wine, and began to study the scheme. He was abnormally quick with his brains at puzzles, and with his hands at conjuring, and it did not take him long to learn how he might convey simple messages by what would seem to be idle taps upon a table or knee. But wine and companionship had always the effect of inspiring him to a farcical ingenuity, and the Professor soon found himself struggling with the too vast energy of the new language, as it passed through the heated brain of Syme.

"WE MUST have several word-signs," said Syme seriously—"words that we are likely to want, fine shades of meaning. My favourite word is 'coeval.' What's yours?"

"Do stop playing the goat," said the Professor plaintively. "You don't know how serious this is."

"'Lush,' too," said Syme, shaking his head sagaciously, "we must have 'lush,' —word applied to grass, don't you know?"

"Do you imagine," asked the Professor furiously, "that we are going to talk to Dr Bull about grass?"

"There are several ways in which the subject could be approached," said Syme reflectively, "and the word introduced without appearing forced. We might say, 'Dr. Bull, as a revolutionist, you remember that a tyrant once advised us to eat grass; and indeed many of us, looking on the fresh lush grass of summer—' "

"Do you understand," said the other, "that this is a tragedy?"

"Perfectly," replied Syme; "always be comic in a tragedy. What the deuce else can you do? I wish this language of yours had a wider scope. I suppose we could not extend it from the fingers to the toes? That would involve pulling off our boots and socks during the conversation, which however unobtrusively performed—"

"Syme," said his friend with a stern simplicity, "go to bed!"

Syme, however, sat up in bed for a considerable time mastering the new code. He was awakened next morning while the east was still sealed with darkness, and found his grey-bearded ally standing like a ghost beside his bed.

Syme sat up in bed blinking; then slowly collected his thoughts, threw off the bedclothes, and stood up. It seemed to him in some curious way that all the safety and sociability of the night before fell with the bedclothes off him, and he stood up in an air of cold danger. He still felt an entire trust and loyalty towards

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his companion; but it was the trust between two men going to the scaffold.

"Well," said Syme with a forced cheerfulness as he pulled on his trousers, "I dreamt of that alphabet of yours. Did it take you long to make it up?"

The Professor made no answer, but gazed in front of him with eyes the colour of a wintry sea; so Syme repeated his question.

"I say, did it take you long to invent all this? I'm considered good at these things, and it was a good hour's grind. Did you learn it all on the spot?"

The Professor was silent; his eyes were wide open, and he wore a fixed but very small smile.

"How long did it take you?"

The Professor did not move.

"Confound you, can't you answer?" called out Syme, in a sudden anger that had something like fear underneath. Whether or no the Professor could answer, he did not.

Syme stood staring back at the stiff face like parchment and the blank, blue eyes. His first thought was that the Professor had gone mad, but his second thought was more frightful. After all, what did he know about this queer creature whom he had heedlessly accepted as a friend? What did he know, except that the man had been at the anarchist breakfast and had told him a ridiculous tale? How improbable it was that there should be another friend there beside Gogol! Was this man's silence a sensational way of declaring war? Was this adamantine stare after all only the awful sneer of some threefold traitor, who had turned for the last time? He stood and strained his ears in this heartless silence. He almost fancied he could hear dynamiters come to capture him shifting softly in the corridor outside.

Then his eyes strayed downwards, and he burst out laughing. Though the Professor himself stood there as voiceless as a statue, his five dumb fingers were dancing alive upon the dead table. Syme watched the twinkling movements of the talking hand, and read clearly the message—

"I will only talk like this. We must get used to it."

He rapped out the answer with the impatience of relief—

"All right. Let's get out to breakfast."

They took their hats and sticks in silence; but as Syme took his sword-stick, he held it hard.

THEY paused for a few minutes only to stuff down coffee and coarse thick sandwiches at a coffee stall, and then made their way across the river, which under the grey and growing light looked as desolate as Acheron. They reached the bottom of the huge block of buildings which they had seen from across the river, and began in silence to mount the naked and numberless stone steps, only pausing now and then to make short remarks on the rail of the banisters. At about every other flight they passed a window; each window showed them a pale and tragic dawn lifting itself laboriously over London. From each the innumerable roofs of slate looked like the leaden surges of a grey, troubled sea after rain. Syme was increasingly conscious that his new adventure had somehow a quality of cold sanity worse than the wild adventures of the past. Last night for instance, the tall tenements had seemed to him like a tower in a dream. As he now went up the weary and perpetual steps, he was daunted and bewildered by their almost infinite series. But it was not the hot horror of a dream or of anything that might be exaggeration or delusion. Their infinity was more like the empty infinity of arithmetic, something unthinkable, yet necessary to thought. Or it was like the stunning statements of astronomy about the distance of the fixed stars. He was ascending the house of reason, a thing more hideous than unreason itself.

By the time they reached Dr. Bull's landing, a last window showed them a harsh, white dawn edged with banks of a kind of coarse red, more like red clay than red cloud. And when they entered Dr. Bull's bare garret it was full of light.

Syme had been haunted by a half historic memory in connection with these empty rooms and that austere daybreak. The moment he saw the garret and Dr. Bull sitting writing at a table, he remembered what the memory was—the French Revolution. There should have been the black outline of a guillotine against that heavy red and white of the morning. Dr. Bull was in his white shirt and black breeches only; his cropped, dark head might well have just come out of its wig; he might have been Marat or a more slipshod Robespierre.

Yet when he was seen properly, the French fancy fell away. The Jacobins were idealists; there was about this man a murderous materialism. His position

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gave him a somewhat new appearance. The strong, white light of morning coming from one side creating sharp shadows, made him seem both more pale and more angular than he had looked at the breakfast on the balcony. Thus the two black glasses that encased his eyes might really have been black cavities in his skull, making him look like a death's-head. And indeed, if ever Death himself sat writing at a wooden table, it might have been he.

He looked up and smiled brightly enough as the men came in, and rose with the resilient rapidity of which the Professor had spoken. He set chairs for both of them, and going to a peg behind the door, proceeded to put on a coat and waistcoat of rough, dark tweed; he buttoned it up neatly, and came back to sit down at his table.

The quiet good humour of his manner left his two opponents helpless. It was with some momentary difficulty that the Professor broke silence and began, "I'm sorry to disturb you so early, comrade," said he, with a careful resumption of the slow de Worms manner. "You have no doubt made all the arrangements for the Paris affair?" Then he added with infinite slowness, "We have information which renders intolerable anything in the nature of a moment's delay."

Dr. Bull smiled again, but continued to gaze on them without speaking. The Professor resumed, a pause before each weary word—

"Please do not think me excessively abrupt; but I advise you to alter those plans, or if it is too late for that, to follow your agent with all the support you can get for him. Comrade Syme and I have had an experience which it would take more time to recount than we can afford, if we are to act on it. I will, however, relate the occurrence in detail, even at the risk of losing time, if you really feel that it is essential to the understanding of the problem we have to discuss."

HE WAS spinning out his sentences, making them intolerably long and lingering, in the hope of maddening the practical little Doctor into an explosion of impatience which might show his hand. But the little Doctor continued only to stare and smile, and the monologue was uphill work. Syme began to feel a new sickness and despair. The Doctor's smile and silence were not at all the cataleptic stare and horrible silence which he had confronted in the Professor half an hour before. About the Professor's make-up and all his antics there was always something merely grotesque, like a gollywog. Syme remembered those wild woes of yesterday as one remembers being afraid of Bogy in childhood. But here was daylight: here was a healthy, square-shouldered man in tweeds, not odd save for the accident of his ugly spectacles, not glaring or grinning at all, but smiling steadily and not saying a word. The whole had a sense of unbearable reality. Under the increasing sunlight the colours of the Doctor's complexion, the pattern of his tweeds, grew and expanded outrageously, as such things grow too important in a realistic novel. But his smile was quite slight, the pose of his head polite; the only uncanny thing was his silence.

"As I say," resumed the Professor, like a man toiling through heavy sand, "the incident that has occurred to us and has led us to ask for information about the Marquis, is one which you may think it better to have narrated; but as it came in the way of Comrade Syme rather than me—"

His words he seemed to be dragging out like words in an anthem; but Syme, who was watching, saw his long fingers rattle quickly on the edge of the crazy table. He read the message, "You must go on. This devil has sucked me dry!"

Syme plunged into the breach with that bravado of improvisation which always came to him when he was alarmed.

"Yes, the thing really happened to me," he said hastily. "I had the good fortune to fall into conversation with a detective who took me, thanks to my hat, for a respectable person. Wishing to clinch my reputation for respectability, I took him and made him very drunk at the Savoy. Under this influence he became friendly, and told me in so many words that within a day or two they hope to arrest the Marquis in France. So unless you or I can get on his track—"

The Doctor was still smiling in the most friendly way, and his protected eyes were still impenetrable. The Professor signalled to Syme that he would resume his explanation, and he began again with the same elaborate calm.

"Syme immediately brought this information to me, and we came here together to see what use you would be inclined to make of it. It seems to me unquestionably urgent that—"

All this time Syme had been staring at

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the Doctor almost as steadily as the Doctor stared at the Professor, but quite without the smile. The nerves of both comrades-in-arms were near snapping under that strain of motionless amiability, when Syme suddenly leant forward and idly tapped the edge of the table. His message to his ally ran, "I have an intuition."

The Professor, with scarcely a pause in his monologue, signalled back, "Then sit on it."

Syme telegraphed, "It is quite extraordinary."

The other answered, "Extraordinary rot!"

Syme said, "I am a poet."

The other retorted, "You are a dead man."

Syme had gone quite red up to his yellow hair, and his eyes were burning feverishly. As he said, he had an intuition, and it had risen to a sort of light-headed certainty. Resuming his symbolic taps, he signalled to his friend, "You scarcely realise how poetic my intuition is. It has that sudden quality we sometimes feel in the coming of spring."

He then studied the answer on his friend's fingers. The answer was, "Go to hell!"

The Professor then resumed his merely verbal monologue addressed to the Doctor.

"Perhaps I should rather say," said Syme on his fingers, "that it resembles that sudden smell of the sea which may be found in the heart of lush woods."

His companion disdained to reply, but his eyes were wary.

"Or yet again," tapped Syme, "it is positive, as is the passionate red hair of a beautiful woman."

The Professor was continuing his speech, but in the middle of it Syme decided to act. He leant across the table, and said in a voice that could not be neglected—

"Dr. Bull!"

The Doctor's sleek and smiling head did not move, but they could have sworn that under his dark glasses his eyes darted towards Syme.

"Dr. Bull," said Syme, in a voice peculiarly precise and courteous, "would you do me a small favour? Would you be so kind as to take off your spectacles?"

The Professor swung round on his seat, and stared at Syme with a sort of frozen fury of astonishment. Syme, like a man who has thrown his life and fortune on the table, leaned forward with a fiery face. The Doctor did not move.

FOR a few seconds there was a silence in which one could hear a pin drop, split once by the hoot of a distant steamer on the Thames. Then Dr. Bull rose, still smiling, and took off his spectacles.

Syme sprang to his feet, stepping backwards a little, like a chemical lecturer from a successful explosion. His eyes were like stars, and for an instant he could only point without speaking.

The Professor had also started to his feet, forgetful of his supposed paralysis. He leant on the back of the chair and stared doubtfully at Dr. Bull, as if the Doctor had been turned into a toad before his eyes. And indeed it was almost as great a transformation scene.

The two detectives saw sitting in the chair before them a very boyish-looking young man, with very frank and happy hazel eyes, an open expression, cockney clothes like those of a city clerk, and an unquestionable breath about him of being very good and rather commonplace. The smile was still there, but it might have been the first smile of a baby.

"I knew I was a poet," cried Syme in a sort of ecstasy. "I knew my intuition was as infallible as the Pope. It was the spectacles that did it! It was all the spectacles! Given those beastly black eyes, and all the rest of him, his health and his jolly looks, made him a live devil among dead ones."

"It certainly does make a queer difference," said the Professor shakily. "But as regards the project of Dr. Bull—"

"Project be damned!" roared Syme, beside himself. "Look at him! Look at his face, look at his collar, look at his blessed boots! You don't suppose, do you, that that thing's an anarchist?"

"Syme!" cried the other in an apprehensive agony.

"Why, by God," said Syme, "I'll take the risk of that myself! Dr. Bull, I am a police officer. There's my card," and he flung down the blue card upon the table.

The Professor still feared that all was lost; but he was loyal. He pulled out his own official card and put it beside his friend's. Then the third man burst out laughing, and for the first time that morning they heard his voice.

"I'm awfully glad you chaps have come so early," he said, with a sort of schoolboy flippancy, "for we can all start for France together. Yes, I'm in the force

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right enough," and he flicked a blue card towards them lightly as a matter of form.

Clapping a brisk bowler on his head and resuming his goblin glasses, the Doctor moved so quickly towards the door, that the others instinctively followed him. Syme seemed a little distrait, and as he passed under the doorway he suddenly struck his stick on the stone passage so that it rang.

"But Lord God Almighty," he cried out, "if this is all right, there were more damned detectives than there were damned dynamiters at the damned Council!"

"We might have fought easily," said Bull; "we were four against three."

The Professor was descending the stairs, but his voice came up from below.

"No," said the voice, "we were not four against three—we were not so lucky. We were four against One."

The others went down the stairs in silence.

The young man called Bull, with an innocent courtesy characteristic of him, insisted on going last until they reached the street; but there his own robust rapidity asserted itself unconsciously, and he walked quickly on ahead towards a railway inquiry office, talking to the others over his shoulder.

"It is jolly to get some pals," he said. "I've been half dead with the jumps, being quite alone. I nearly flung my arms round Gogol and embraced him, which would have been imprudent. I hope you won't despise me for having been in a blue funk."

"All the blue devils in blue hell," said Syme, "contributed to my blue funk! But the worst devil was you and your infernal goggles."

THE young man laughed delightedly. "Wasn't it a rag?" he said. "Such a simple idea—not my own. I haven't got the brains. You see, I wanted to go into the detective service, especially the anti-dynamite business. But for that purpose they wanted some one to dress up as a dynamiter; and they all swore by blazes that I could never look like a dynamiter. They said my very walk was respectable, and that seen from behind I looked like the British Constitution. They said I looked too healthy and too optimistic, and too reliable and benevolent; they called me all sorts of names at Scotland Yard. They said that if I had been a criminal, I might have made my fortune by looking so like an honest man; but as I had the misfortune to be an honest man, there was not even the remotest chance of my assisting them by ever looking like a criminal. But at last I was brought before some old josser who was high up in the force, and who seemed to have no end of a head on his shoulders. And there the others all talked hopelessly. One asked whether a bushy beard would hide my nice smile; another said that if they blacked my face I might look like a Negro anarchist; but this old chap chipped in with a most extraordinary remark. 'A pair of smoked spectacles will do it,' he said positively. 'Look at him now; he looks like an angelic office boy. Put him on a pair of smoked spectacles, and children will scream at the sight of him.' And so it was, by George! When once my eyes were covered all the rest, smile and big shoulders and short hair, made me look a perfect little devil. As I say, it was simple enough when it was done, like miracles; but that wasn't the really miraculous part of it. There was one really staggering thing about the business, and my head still turns at it."

"What was that?" asked Syme.

"I'll tell you," answered the man in spectacles. "This big pot in the police who sized me up so that he knew how the goggles would go with my hair and socks—by God, he never saw me at all!"

Syme's eyes suddenly flashed on him.

"How was that?" he asked. "I thought you talked to him."

"So I did," said Bull brightly; "but we talked in a pitch-dark room like a coal cellar. There, you would never have guessed that."

"I could not have conceived it," said Syme gravely.

"It is indeed a new idea," said the Professor.

Their new ally was in practical matters a whirlwind. At the inquiry office he asked with businesslike brevity about the trains for Dover. Having got his information, he bundled the company into a cab, and put them and himself inside a railway carriage before they had properly realized the breathless process. They were already on the Calais boat before conversation flowed freely.

"I had already arranged," he explained, "to go to France for my lunch; but I am delighted to have some one to lunch with me. You see, I had to send that beast, the Marquis, over with his bomb, because the President had his eye on me,

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though God knows how. I'll tell you the story some day. It was perfectly choking. Whenever I tried to slip out of it I saw the President somewhere, smiling out of the bow-window of a club or taking off his hat to me from the top of an omnibus. I tell you, you can say what you like, that fellow sold himself to the devil; he can be in six places at once."

"So you sent the Marquis off, I understand," asked the Professor, "Was it long ago? Shall we be in time to catch him?"

"Yes," answered the new guide, "I've timed it all. He'll still be at Calais when we arrive."

"But when we do catch him at Calais," said the Professor, "what are we going to do?"

At this question the countenance of Dr. Bull fell for the first time. He reflected a little, and then said—

"Theoretically, I suppose, we ought to call the police."

"Not I," said Syme. "Theoretically I ought to drown myself first. I promised a poor fellow, who was a real modern pessimist, on my word of honour not to tell the police. I'm no hand at casuistry, but I can't break my word to a modern pessimist. It's like breaking one's word to a child."

"I'm in the same boat," said the Professor. "I tried to tell the police and I couldn't, because of some silly oath I took.

"You see, when I was an actor I was a sort of all-round beast. Perjury or treason is the only crime I haven't committed. If I did that I shouldn't now the difference between right and wrong."

"I've been through all that," said Dr. Bull, "and I've made up my mind. I gave my promise to the Secretary—you know him, man who smiles upside down. My friends, that man is the most utterly unhappy man that was ever human. It may be his digestion, or his conscience, or his nerves, or his philosophy of the universe, but he's damned, he's in hell! Well, I can't turn on a man like that, and hunt him down.

"It's like whipping a leper. I may be mad, but that's how I feel; and there's jolly well the end of it."

"I don't think you're mad," said Syme. "I knew you would decide like that when first you—"

"Eh?" said Dr. Bull.

"When first you took off your spectacles."

DR. BULL smiled a little, and strolled across the deck to look at the sunlit sea. Then he strolled back again, kicking his heels carelessly, and a companionable silence fell between the three men.

"Well," said Syme, "it seems that we have all the same kind of morality or immorality, so we had better face the fact that comes of it."

"Yes," assented the Professor, "you're quite right; and we must hurry up, for I can see the Grey Nose standing out from France."

"The fact that comes of it," said Syme seriously, "is this, that we three are alone on this planet. Gogol has gone, God knows where; perhaps the President has smashed him like a fly. On the Council we are three men against three, like the Romans who held the bridge. But we are worse off than that, first because they can appeal to their organization and we cannot appeal to ours, and second because—"

"Because one of those other three men," said the Professor, "is not a man."

Syme nodded and was silent for a second or two, then he said—

"My idea is this. We must do something to keep the Marquis in Calais till tomorrow midday. I have turned over twenty schemes in my head. We cannot denounce him as a dynamiter; that is agreed. We cannot get him detained on some trivial charge, for we should have to appear; he knows us, and he would smell a rat. We cannot pretend to keep him on anarchist business; he might swallow much in that way, but not the notion of stopping in Calais while the Czar went safely through Paris. We might try to kidnap him, and lock him up ourselves; but he is a well-known man here. He has a whole body-guard of friends; he is very strong and brave, and the event is doubtful. The only thing I can see to do is actually to take advantage of the very things that are in the Marquis's favour. I am going to profit by the fact that he is a highly respected nobleman. I am going to profit by the fact that he has many friends and moves in the best society."

"What the devil are you talking about?" asked the Professor.

"The Symes are first mentioned in the fourteenth century," said Syme; "but there is a tradition that one of them rode behind Bruce at Bannockburn. Since 1350 the tree is quite clear."

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"He's gone off his head," said the little Doctor, staring.

"Our bearings," continued Syme calmly, "are 'argent a chevron glues charged with three cross crosslets of the field.' The motto varies."

The Professor seized Syme roughly by the waistcoat.

"We are just inshore," he said. "Are you seasick or joking in the wrong place?"

"My remarks are almost painfully practical," answered Syme, in an unhurried manner. "The house of St. Eustache also is very ancient. The Marquis cannot deny that he is a gentleman. He cannot deny that I am a gentleman. And in order to put the matter of my social position quite beyond a doubt, I propose at the earliest opportunity to knock his hat off. But here we are in the harbour."

They went on shore under the strong sun in a sort of daze. Syme, who had now taken the lead as Bull had taken it in London, led them along a kind of marine parade until he came to some cafes, embowered in a bulk of greenery and overlooking the sea. As he went before them his step was slightly swaggering, and he swung his stick like a sword. He was making apparently for the extreme end of the line of cafes, but he stopped abruptly. With a sharp gesture he motioned them to silence, but he pointed with one gloved finger to a cafe table under a bank of flowering foliage at which sat the Marquis de St. Eustache, his teeth shining in his thick, black beard, and his bold, brown face shadowed by a light yellow straw hat and outlined against the violet sea.

CHAPTER X

THE DUEL

SYME sat down at a café table with his companions, his blue eyes sparkling like the bright sea below, and ordered a bottle of Saumur with a pleased impatience. He was for some reason in a condition of curious hilarity. His spirits were already unnaturally high; they rose as the Saumur sank, and in half an hour his talk was a torrent of nonsense. He professed to be making out a plan of the conversation which was going to ensue between himself and the deadly Marquis. He jotted it down wildly with a pencil. It was arranged like a printed catechism, with questions and answers, and was delivered with an extraordinary rapidity of utterance.

"I shall approach. Before taking off his hat, I shall take off my own. I shall say, 'The Marquis de Saint Eustache, I believe.' He will say, 'The celebrated Mr. Syme, I presume.' He will say in the most exquisite French, 'How are you?' I shall reply in the most exquisite Cockney, 'Oh, just the Syme—"

"Oh, shut it!" said the man in spectacles. "Pull yourself together, and chuck away that bit of paper. What are you really going to do?"

"But it was a lovely catechism," said Syme pathetically. "Do let me read it you. It has only forty-three questions and answers, and some of the Marquis's answers are wonderfully witty. I like to be just to my enemy."

"But what's the good of it all?" asked Dr. Bull in exasperation.

"It leads up to my challenge, don't you see," said Syme, beaming. "When the Marquis has given the thirty-ninth reply, which runs—"

"Has it by any chance occurred to you," asked the Professor, with a ponderous simplicity, "that the Marquis may not say all the forty-three things you have put down for him? In that case, I understand, your own epigrams may appear somewhat more forced."

Syme struck the table with a radiant face.

"Why, how true that is," he said, "and I never thought of it. Sir, you have an intellect beyond the common. You will make a name."

"Oh, you're as drunk as an owl!" said the Doctor.

"It only remains," continued Syme quite unperturbed, "to adopt some other method of breaking the ice (if I may so express it) between myself and the man I wish to kill. And since the course of a dialogue cannot be predicted by one of its parties alone (as you have pointed out with such recondite acumen), the only thing to be done, I suppose, is for the one party, as far as possible, to do all the dialogue by himself. And so I will, by George!" And he stood up suddenly, his yellow hair blowing in the slight sea breeze.

A band was playing in a *café chantant* hidden somewhere among the trees, and a woman had just stopped singing. On Syme's heated head the bray of the brass band seemed like the jar and jingle of that barrel-organ in Leicester Square, to

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the tune of which he had once stood up to die. He looked across to the little table where the Marquis sat. The man had two companions now, solemn Frenchmen in frock-coats and silk hats, one of them with the red rosette of the Legion of Honour, evidently people of a solid social position. Beside these black, cylindrical costumes, the Marquis, in his loose straw hat and light spring clothes, looked Bohemian and even barbaric; but he looked the Marquis. Indeed, one might say that he looked the king, with his animal elegance, his scornful eyes, and his proud head lifted against the purple sea. But he was no Christian king, at any rate; he was, rather, some swarthy despot, half Greek, half Asiastic, who in the days when slavery seemed natural looked down on the Mediterranean, on his galley and his groaning slaves. Just so, Syme thought, would the brown-gold face of such a tyrant have shown against the dark green olives and the burning blue.

"Are you going to address the meeting?" asked the Professor peevishly, seeing that Syme still stood up without moving.

SYME drained his last glass of sparkling wine.

"I am," he said, pointing across to the Marquis and his companions, "that meeting. That meeting displeases me. I am going to pull that meeting's great ugly, mahogany-coloured nose."

He stepped across swiftly, if not quite steadily. The Marquis, seeing him, arched his black Assyrian eyebrows in surprise, but smiled politely.

"You are Mr. Syme, I think," he said.

Syme bowed.

"And you are the Marquis de Saint Eustache," he said gracefully. "Permit me to pull your nose."

He leant over to do so, but the Marquis started backwards, upsetting his chair, and the two men in top hats held Syme back by the shoulders.

"This man has insulted me!" said Syme, with gestures of explanation.

"Insulted you?" cried the gentleman with the red rosette, "when?"

"Oh, just now," said Syme recklessly. "He insulted my mother."

"Insulted your mother!" exclaimed the gentleman incredulously.

"Well, anyhow," said Syme, conceding a point, "my aunt."

"But how can the Marquis have insulted your aunt just now?" said the second gentleman with some legitimate wonder. "He has been sitting here all the time."

"Ah, it was what he said!" said Syme darkly.

"I said nothing at all," said the Marquis, "except something about the band. I only said that I liked Wagner played well."

"It was an allusion to my family," said Syme firmly. "My aunt played Wagner badly. It was a painful subject. We are always being insulted about it."

"This seems most extraordinary," said the gentleman who was *décoré,* looking doubtfully at the Marquis.

"Oh, I assure you," said Syme earnestly, "the whole of your conversation was simply packed with sinister allusions to my aunt's weaknesses."

"This is nonsense!" said the second gentleman. "I for one have said nothing for half an hour except that I liked the singing of that girl with black hair."

"Well, there you are again!" said Syme indignantly. "My aunt's was red."

"It seems to me," said the other, "that you are simply seeking a pretext to insult the Marquis."

"By George!" said Syme, facing round and looking at him, "what a clever chap you are!"

The Marquis started up with eyes flaming like a tiger's.

"Seeking a quarrel with me!" he cried. "Seeking a fight with me! By God! there was never a man who had to seek long. These gentlemen will perhaps act for me. There are still four hours of daylight. Let us fight this evening."

Syme bowed with a quite beautiful graciousness.

"Marquis," he said, "your action is worthy of your fame and blood. Permit me to consult for a moment with the gentlemen in whose hands I shall place myself."

In three long strides he rejoined his companions, and they, who had seen his champagne-inspired attack and listened to his idiotic explanations, were quite startled at the look of him. For now that he came back to them he was quite sober, a little pale, and he spoke in a low voice of passionate practicality.

"I have done it," he said hoarsely. "I have fixed a fight on the beast. But look here, and listen carefully. There is no time for talk. You are my seconds, and everything must come from you. Now you must insist, and insist absolute-

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ly, on the duel coming off after seven to-morrow, so as to give me the chance of preventing him from catching the 7.45 for Paris. If he misses that he misses his crime. He can't refuse to meet you on such a small point of time and place. But this is what he will do. He will choose a field somewhere near a wayside station, where he can pick up the train. He is a very good swordsman, and he will trust to killing me in time to catch it. But I can fence well too, and I think I can keep him in play, at any rate, until the train is lost. Then perhaps he may kill me to console his feelings. You understand? Very well then, let me introdue you to some charming friends of mine," and leading them quickly across the parade, he presented them to the Marquis's seconds by two very aristocratic names of which they had not previously heard.

Syme was subject to spasms of singular common sense, not otherwise a part of his character. They were (as he said of his impulse about the spectacles) poetic intuitions, and they sometimes rose to the exaltation of prophecy.

He had correctly calculated in this case the policy of his opponent. When the Marquis was informed by his seconds that Syme could only fight in the morning, he must fully have realized that an obstacle had suddenly arisen between him and his bomb-throwing business in the capital. Naturally he could not explain this objection to his friends, so he chose the course which Syme had predicted. He induced his seconds to settle on a small meadow not far from the railway, and he trusted to the fatality of the first engagement.

WHEN he came down very coolly to the field of honour, no one could have guessed that he had any anxiety about a journey; his hands were in his pockets, his straw hat on the back of his head, his handsome face brazen in the sun. But it might have struck a stranger as odd that there appeared in his train, not only his seconds carrying the sword-case, but two of his servants carrying a portmanteau and a luncheon basket.

Early as was the hour, the sun soaked everything in warmth, and Syme was vaguely surprised to see so many spring flowers burning gold and silver in the tall grass in which the whole company stood almost knee-deep.

With the exception of the Marquis, all the men were in sombre and solemn morning-dress, with hats like black chimney-pots; the little Doctor especially, with the addition of his black spectacles, looked like an undertaker in a farce. Syme could not help feeling a comic contrast between this funereal church parade of apparel and the rich and glistening meadow, growing wild flowers everywhere. But, indeed, this comic contrast between the yellow blossoms and the black hats was but a symbol of the tragic contrast between the yellow blossoms and the black business. On his right was a little wood; far away to his left lay the long curve of the railway line, which he was, so to speak, guarding from the Marquis, whose goal and escape it was. In front of him, behind the black group of his opponents, he could see, like a tinted cloud, a small almond bush in flower against the faint line of the sea.

The member of the Legion of Honour, whose name it seemed was Colonel Ducroix, approached the Professor and Dr. Bull with great politeness, and suggested that the play should terminate with the first considerable hurt.

Dr. Bull, however, having been carefully coached by Syme upon this point of policy, insisted, with great dignity and in very bad French, that it should continue until one of the combatants was disabled. Syme had made up his mind that he could avoid disabling the Marquis and prevent the Marquis from disabling him for at least twenty minutes. In twenty minutes the Paris train would have gone by.

"To a man of the well-known skill and valour of Monsieur de St. Eustache," said the Professor solemnly, "it must be a matter of indifference which method is adopted, and our principal has strong reasons for demanding the longer encounter, reasons the delicacy of which prevent me from being explicit, but for the just and honourable nature of which I can—"

"Peste!" broke from the Marquis behind, whose face had suddenly darkened, "let us stop talking and begin," and he slashed off the head of a tall flower with his stick.

Syme understood his rude impatience, and instinctively looked over his shoulder to see whether the train was coming in sight. But there was no smoke on the horizon.

Colonel Ducroix knelt down and unlocked the case, taking out a pair of twin

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swords, which took the sunlight and turned to two streaks of white fire. He offered one to the Marquis, who snatched it without ceremony, and another to Syme, who took it, bent it, and poised it with as much delay as was consistent with dignity. Then the Colonel took out another pair of blades, and taking one himself and giving another to Dr. Bull, proceeded to place the men.

Both combatants had thrown off their coats and waistcoats, and stood sword in hand. The seconds stood on each side of the line of fight with drawn swords also, but still sombre in their dark frock-coats and hats. The principals saluted. The Colonel said quietly, "Engage!" and the two blades touched and tingled.

When the jar of the joined iron ran up Syme's arm, all the fantastic fears that have been the subject of this story fell from him like dreams from a man waking up in bed. He remembered them clearly and in order as mere delusions of the nerves—how the fear of the Professor had been the fear of the tyrannic accidents of nightmare, and how the fear of the Doctor had been the fear of the airless vacuum of science. The first was the old fear that any miracle might happen, the second the more hopeless modern fear that no miracle can ever happen. But he saw that these fears were fancies, for he found himself in the presence of the great fact of the fear of death, with its coarse and pitiless common sense. He felt like a man who had dreamed all night of falling over precipices, and had woke up on the morning when he was to be hanged. For as soon as he had seen the sunlight run down the channel of his foe's foreshortened blade, and as soon as he had felt the two tongues of steel touch, vibrating like two living things, he knew that his enemy was a terrible fighter, and that probably his last hour had come.

HE FELT a strange and vivid value in all the earth around him, in the grass under his feet; he felt the love of life in all living things. He could almost fancy that he heard the grass growing; he could almost fancy that even as he stood fresh flowers were springing up and breaking into blossom in the meadow—flowers blood-red and burning gold and blue, fulfilling the whole pageant of the spring. And whenever his eyes strayed for a flash from the calm, staring, hypnotic eyes of the Marquis, they saw the little tuft of almond tree against the sky-line. He had the feeling that if by some miracle he escaped he would be ready to sit forever before that almond tree, desiring nothing else in the world.

But while earth and sky and everything had the living beauty of a thing lost, the other half of his head was as clear as glass, and he was parrying his enemy's point with a kind of clockwork skill of which he had hardly supposed himself capable. Once his enemy's point ran along his wrist, leaving a slight streak of blood, but it either was not noticed or was tacitly ignored. Every now and then he *riposted,* and once or twice he could almost fancy that he felt his point go home, but as there was no blood on blade or shirt he supposed he was mistaken. Then came an interruption and a change.

At the risk of losing all, the Marquis, interrupting his quiet stare, flashed one glance over his shoulder at the line of railway on his right. Then he turned on Syme a face transfigured to that of a fiend, and began to fight as if with twenty weapons. The attack came so fast and furious, that the one shining sword seemed a shower of shining arrows. Syme had no chance to look at the railway; but also he had no need. He could guess the reason of the Marquis's sudden madness of battle—the Paris train was in sight.

But the Marquis' morbid energy overreached itself. Twice Syme, parrying, knocked his oppenent's point far out of the fighting circle; and the third time his *riposte* was so rapid, that there was no doubt about the hit this time. Syme's sword actually bent under the weight of the Marquis's body, which it had pierced. Syme was as certain that he had stuck his blade into his enemy as a gardener that he has stuck his spade into the ground. Yet the Marquis sprang back from the stroke without a stagger, and Syme stood staring at his own sword-point like an idiot. There was no blood on it at all.

There was an instant of rigid silence, and then Syme in his turn fell furiously on the other, filled with a flaming curiosity. The Marquis was probably, in a general sense, a better fencer than he, as he had surmised at the beginning, but at the moment the Marquis seemed distraught and at a disadvantage. He fought wildly and even weakly, and he constantly looked away at the railway line, almost as if he feared the train more than

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"This one old Christian lantern you shall not destroy," cried Syme in a terrible voice

the pointed steel. Syme, on the other hand, fought fiercely but still carefully, in an intellectual fury, eager to solve the riddle of his own bloodless sword. For this purpose, he aimed less at the Marquis's body, and more at his throat and head. A minute and a half afterwards he felt his point enter the man's neck below his jaw. It came out clean. Half mad, he thrust again, and made what should have been a bloody scar on the Marquis's cheek. But there was no scar.

For one moment the heaven of Syme again grew black with supernatural terrors. Surely the man had a charmed life. But this new spiritual dread was a more awful thing than had been the mere spiritual topsy-turvydom symbolized by the paralytic who pursued him. The Professor was only a goblin; this man was a devil—perhaps he was the Devil! Anyhow, this was certain, that three times had a human sword been driven into him and made no mark. When Syme had that thought he drew himself up, and all that was good in him sang high up in the air as a high wind sings in the trees. He thought of all the human things in his story—of the Chinese lanterns in Saffron Park, of the girl's red hair in the garden, of the honest, beer-swilling sailors down by the dock, of his loyal companions standing by. Perhaps he had been chosen as a champion of all these fresh and kindly things to cross swords with the enemy of all creation. "After all," he said to himself, "I am more than a devil; I am a man. I can do the one thing which Satan himself cannot do—I can die," and as the word went through his head, he heard a faint and far-off hoot, which would soon be the roar of the Paris train.

He fell to fighting again with a supernatural levity, like a Mohammedan panting for Paradise. As the train came nearer and nearer he fancied he could see people putting up the floral arches in Paris; he joined in the growing noise and the glory of the great Republic whose gate he was guarding against Hell. His thoughts rose higher and higher with the rising roar of the train, which ended, as if proudly, in a long and piercing whistle. The train stopped.

Suddenly, to the astonishment of every one, the Marquis sprang back quite out of sword reach and threw down his sword. The leap was not the less wonderful because Syme had plunged his sword a moment before into the man's thigh.

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"Stop!" said the Marquis in a voice that compelled a momentary obedience. "I want to say something."

"What is the matter?" asked Colonel Ducroix, staring. "Has there been foul play?"

"There has been foul play somewhere," said Dr. Bull, who was a little pale. "Our principal has wounded the Marquis four times at least, and he is none the worse."

THE Marquis put up his hand with a curious air of ghastly patience.

"Please let me speak," he said. "It is rather important. Mr. Syme," he continued, turning to his opponent, "we were fighting to-day, if I remember right, because you expressed a wish (which I thought irrational) to pull my nose. Would you oblige me by pulling my nose now as quickly as possible? I have to catch a train."

"I protest that this is most irregular," said Dr. Bull indignantly.

"It is certainly somewhat opposed to precedent," said Colonel Ducroix, looking wistfully at his principal. "There is, I think, one case on record (Captain Bellegarde and the Baron Zumpt) in which the weapons were changed in the middle of the encounter at the request of one of the combatants. But one can hardly call one's nose a weapon."

"Will you or will you not pull my nose?" said the Marquis in exasperation. "Come, come, Mr. Syme! You wanted to do it, do it! You can have no conception of how important it is to me. Don't be so selfish! Pull my nose at once, when I ask you!" and he bent slightly forward with a fascinating smile.

The Paris train, panting and groaning, had grated into a little station behind the neighbouring hill.

Syme had the feeling he had more than once had in these adventures—the sense that a horrible and sublime wave lifted to heaven was just toppling over. Walking in a world he half understood, he took two paces forward and seized the Roman nose of this remarkable nobleman. He pulled it hard, and it came off in his hand.

He stood for some seconds with a foolish solemnity, with the pasteboard proboscis still between his fingers, looking at it, while the sun and the clouds and the wooded hills looked down upon this imbecile scene.

The Marquis broke the silence in a loud and cheerful voice.

"If any one has any use for my left eyebrow," he said, "he can have it. Colonel Ducroix, do accept my left eyebrow! It's the kind of thing that might come in useful any day," and he gravely tore off one of his swarthy Assyrian brows, bringing about half his brown forehead with it, and politely offered it to the Colonel, who stood crimson and speechless with rage.

"If I had known," he spluttered, "that I was acting for a poltroon who pads himself to fight—"

"Oh, I know, I know!" said the Marquis, recklessly throwing various parts of himself right and left about the field. "You are making a mistake; but it can't be explained just now. I tell you the train has come into the station!"

"Yes," said Dr. Bull fiercely, "and the train shall go out of the station. It shall go out without you. We know well enough for what devil's work—"

The mysterious Marquis lifted his hands with a desperate gesture. He was a strange scarecrow, standing there in the sun with half his old face peeled off, and half another face glaring and grinning from underneath.

"Will you drive me mad?" he cried. "The train—"

"You shall not go by the train," said Syme firmly, and grasped his sword.

The wild figure turned towards Syme, and seemed to be gathering itself for a sublime effort before speaking.

"You great fat, blasted, blear-eyed, blundering, thundering, brainless, God-forsaken, doddering, damned fool!" he said without taking breath. "You great silly, pink-faced, towheaded turnip! You—"

"You shall not go by this train," repeated Syme.

"And why the infernal blazes," roared the other, "should I want to go by the train?"

"We know all," said the Professor sternly. "You are going to Paris to throw a bomb!"

"Going to Jericho to throw a Jabberwock!" cried the other, tearing his hair, which came off easily. "Have you all got softening of the brain, that you don't realize what I am? Did you really think I wanted to catch that train? Twenty Paris trains might go by for me. Damn Paris trains!"

"Then what did you care about?" began the Professor.

"What did I care about? I didn't care

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about catching the train; I cared about whether the train caught me, and now, by God! it has caught me."

"I regret to inform you," said Syme with restraint, "that your remarks convey no impression to my mind. Perhaps if you were to remove the remains of your original forehead and some portion of what was once your chin, your meaning would become clearer. Mental lucidity fulfils itself in many ways. What do you mean by saying that the train has caught you? It may be my literary fancy, but somehow I feel that it ought to mean something."

"It means everything," said the other, "and the end of everything. Sunday has us now in the hollow of his hand."

"Us!" repeated the Professor, as if stupefied. "What do you mean by 'us'?"

"The police, of course!" said the Marquis, and tore off his scalp and half his face.

The head which emerged was the blonde, well-brushed, smooth-haired head which is common to the English constabulary, but the face was terribly pale.

"I am Inspector Ratcliffe," he said, which is common in the English conness. "My name is pretty well known to the police, and I can see well enough that you belong to them. But if there is any doubt about my position, I have a card—" and he began to pull a blue card from his pocket.

THE Professor gave a tired gesture.

"Oh, don't show it us," he said wearily; "we've got enough of them to equip a paper-chase."

The little man named Bull had, like many men who seem to be of a mere vivacious vulgarity, sudden movements of good taste. Here he certainly saved the situation. In the midst of this staggering transformation scene he stepped forward with all the gravity and responsibility of a second, and addressed the two seconds of the Marquis.

"Gentlemen," he said, "we all owe you a serious apology; but I assure you that you have not been made the victims of such a low joke as you imagine, or indeed of anything undignified in a man of honour. You have not wasted your time; you have helped to save the world. We are not buffoons, but very desperate men at war with a vast conspiracy. A secret society of anarchists is hunting us like hares; not such unfortunate madmen as may here or there throw a bomb through starvation or German philosophy, but a rich and powerful and fanatical church, a church of eastern pessimism, which holds it holy to destroy mankind like vermin. How hard they hunt us you can gather from the fact that we are driven to such disguises as those for which I apologize, and to such pranks as this one by which you suffer."

The younger second of the Marquis, a short man with a black moustache, bowed politely, and said—

"Of course, I accept the apology; but you will in your turn forgive me if I decline to follow you further into your difficulties, and permit myself to say good-morning! The sight of an acquaintance and distinguished fellow-townsman coming to pieces in the open air is unusual, and, upon the whole, sufficient for one day. Colonel Ducroix, I would be in no way influence your actions, but if you feel with me that our present society is a little abnormal, I am now going to walk back to the town."

Colonel Ducroix moved mechanically, but then tugged abruptly at his white moustache and broke out—

"No, by George! I won't. If these gentlemen are really in a mess with a lot of low wreckers like that, I'll see them through it. I have fought for France, and it is hard if I can't fight for civilization."

Dr. Bull took off his hat and waved it, cheering as at a public meeting.

"Don't make too much noise," said Inspector Ratcliffe, "Sunday may hear you."

"Sunday!" cried Bull, and dropped his hat.

"Yes," retorted Ratcliffe, "he may be with them."

"With whom?" asked Syme.

"With the people out of that train," said the other.

"What you say seems utterly wild," began Syme. "Why, as a matter of fact— But, by God," he cried out suddenly, like a man who sees an explosion a long way off, "by God! if this is true the whole bally lot of us on the Anarchist Council were against anarchy! Every born man was a detective except the President and his personal secretary. What can it mean?"

"Mean!" said the new policeman with incredible violence. "It means that we are struck dead! Don't you know Sunday? Don't you know that his jokes are always so big and simple that one has never thought of them? Can you think

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of anything more like Sunday than this, that he should put all his powerful enemies on the Supreme Council, and then take care that it was not supreme? I tell you, he has bought every trust, he has captured every cable, he has control of every railway line—especially of *that* railway line!" and he pointed a shaking finger towards the small wayside station. "The whole movement was controlled by him; half the world was ready to rise for him. But there were just five people, perhaps, who would have resisted him . . . and the old devil put them on the Supreme Council, to waste their time in watching each other. Idiots that we are, he planned the whole of our idiocies! Sunday knew that the Professor would chase Syme through London, and that Syme would fight me in France. And he was combining great masses of capital, and seizing great lines of telegraphy, while we five idiots were running after each other like a lot of confounded babies playing blind man's buff."

"Well?" asked Syme with a sort of steadiness.

"Well," replied the other with sudden serenity, "he has found us playing blind man's buff to-day in a field of great rustic beauty and extreme solitude. He has probably captured the world; it only remains to him to capture this field and all the fools in it. And since you really want to know what was my objection to the arrival of that train I will tell you. My objection was that Sunday or his Secretary has just this moment got out of it."

Syme uttered an involuntary cry, and they all turned their eyes towards the far-off station. It was quite true that a considerable bulk of people seemed to be moving in their direction. But they were too distant to be distinguished in any way.

"It was a habit of the late Marquis de St. Eustache," said the new policeman, producing a leather case, "always to carry a pair of opera-glasses. Either the President or the Secretary is coming after us with that mob. They have caught us in a nice quiet place where we are under no temptations to break our oaths by calling the police. Dr. Bull, I have a suspicion that you will see better through these than through your own highly decorative spectacles."

He handed the field-glasses to the Doctor, who immediately took off his spectacles and put the apparatus to his eyes.

"It cannot be as bad as you say," said the Professor, somewhat shaken. "There are a good number of them certainly, but they may easily be ordinary tourists."

"Do ordinary tourists," asked Bull, with the field-glass to his eyes," wear black masks half-way down the face?"

Syme almost tore the glasses out of his hand, and looked through them. Most men in the advancing mob really looked ordinary enough; but it was quite true that two or three of the leaders in front wore black half-masks almost down to their mouths. This disguise is very complete, especially at such a distance, and Syme found it impossible to conclude anything from the clean-shaven jaws and chins of the men talking in the front. But presently as they talked they all smiled, and one of them smiled on one side.

CHAPTER XI

THE CRIMINALS CHASE THE POLICE

SYME put the field-glass from his eyes with an almost ghastly relief.

"The President is not with them, anyhow," he said, and wiped his forehead.

"But surely they are right away on the horizon," said the bewildered Colonel, blinking and but half recovered from Bull's hasty though polite explanation. "Could you possibly know your President among all those people?"

"Could I know a white elephant among all those people!" answered Syme somewhat irritably. "As you very truly say, they are on the horizon; but if he were walking with them . . . by God! I believe this ground would shake."

After an instant's pause the new man called Ratcliffe said with gloomy decision—

"Of course the President isn't with them. I wish to Gemini he were. Much more likely the President is riding in triumph through Paris, or sitting on the ruins of St. Paul's Cathedral."

"This is absurd!" said Syme. "Something may have happened in our absence; but he cannot have carried the world with a rush like that. It is quite true," he added, frowning dubiously at the distant fields that lay towards the little station, "it is certainly true that there seems to be a crowd coming this way; but they are not all the army that you make out."

"Oh, they," said the new detective con-

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temptuously; "no, they are not a very valuable force. But let me tell you frankly that they are precisely calculated to our value—we are not much, my boy, in Sunday's universe. He has got hold of all the cables and telegraphs himself. But to kill the Supreme Council he regards as a trivial matter, like a post-card; it may be left to his private secretary," and he spat on the grass.

Then he turned to the others and said somewhat austerely—

"There is a great deal to be said for death; but if any one has any preference for the other alternative, I strongly advise him to walk after me."

With these words, he turned his broad back and strode with silent energy towards the wood. The others gave one glance over their shoulders, and saw that the dark cloud of men had detached itself from the station and was moving with a mysterious discipline across the plain. They saw already, even with the naked eye, black blots on the foremost faces, which marked the masks they wore. They turned and followed their leader, who had already struck the wood, and disappeared among the twinkling trees.

The sun on the grass was dry and hot. So in plunging into the wood they had a cool shock of shadow, as of divers who plunge into a dim pool. The inside of the wood was full of shattered sunlight and shaken shadows. They made a sort of shuddering veil, almost recalling the dizziness of a cinematograph. Even the solid figures walking with him Syme could hardly see for the patterns of sun and shade that danced upon them. Now a man's head was lit as with a light of Rembrandt, leaving all else obliterated; now again he had strong and staring white hands with the face of a Negro. The ex-Marquis had pulled the old straw hat over his eyes, and the black shade of the brim cut his face so squarely in two that it seemed to be wearing one of the black half-masks of their pursuers. The fancy tinted Syme's overwhelming sense of wonder. Was he wearing a mask? Was any one wearing a mask? Was any one anything? This wood of witchery, in which men's faces turned black and white by turns, in which their figures first swelled into sunlight and then faded into formless night, this mere chaos of chiaroscuro (after the clear daylight outside), seemed to Syme a perfect symbol of the world in which he had been moving for three days, this world where men took off their beards and their spectacles and their noses, and turned into other people. That tragic self-confidence which he had felt when he believed that the Marquis was a devil had strangely disappeared now that he knew that the Marquis was a friend. He felt almost inclined to ask after all these bewilderments what was a friend and what an enemy. Was there anything that was apart from what it seemed? The Marquis had taken off his nose and turned out to be a detective. Might he not just as well take off his head and turn out to be a hobgoblin? Was not everything, after all, like this bewildering woodland, this dance of dark and light? Everything only a glimpse, the glimpse always unforeseen, and always forgotten. For Gabriel Syme had found in the heart of that sun-splashed wood what many modern painters had found there. He had found the thing which the modern people call Impressionism, which is another name for that final scepticism which can find no floor to the universe.

AS a man in an evil dream strains himself to scream and wake, Syme strove with a sudden effort to fling off this last and worst of his fancies. With two impatient strides he overtook the man in the Marquis's straw hat, the man whom he had come to address as Ratcliffe. In a voice exaggeratively loud and cheerful, he broke the bottomless silence and made conversation.

"May I ask," he said, "where on earth we are all going to?"

So genuine had been the doubts of his soul, that he was quite glad to hear his companion speak in an easy, human voice.

"We must get down through the town of Lancy to the sea," he said. "I think that part of the country is least likely to be with them."

"What can you mean by all this?" cried Syme. "They can't be running the real world in that way. Surely not many working men are anarchists, and surely if they were, mere mobs could not beat modern armies and police."

"Mere mobs!" repeated his new friend with a snort of scorn. "So you talk about mobs and the working classes as if they were the question. You've got that eternal idiotic idea that if anarchy came it would come from the poor. Why should it? The poor have been rebels, but they

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have never been anarchists; they have more interest than any one else in there being some decent government. The poor man really has a stake in the country. The rich man hasn't; he can go away to New Guinea in a yacht. The poor have sometimes objected to being governed badly; the rich have always objected to being governed at all. Aristocrats were always anarchists, as you can see from the barons' wars."

"As a lecture on English history for the little ones," said Syme, "this is all very nice; but I have not yet grasped its application."

"Its application is," said his informant, "that most of old Sunday's right-hand men are South African and American millionaires. That is why he has got hold of all the communications; and that is why the last four champions of the anti-anarchist police force are running through a wood like rabbits."

"Millionaires I can understand," said Syme thoughtfully, "they are nearly all mad. But getting hold of a few wicked old gentlemen with hobbies is one thing; getting hold of great Christian nations is another. I would bet the nose off my face (forgive the allusion) that Sunday would stand perfectly helpless before the task of covering any ordinary healthy person anywhere."

"Well," said the other, "it rather depends what sort of person you mean."

"Well, for instance," said Syme, "we could never convert that person," and he pointed straight in front of him.

They had come to an open space of sunlight, which seemed to express to Syme the final return of his own good sense; and in the middle of this forest clearing was a figure that might well stand for that common sense in an almost awful actuality. Burnt by the sun and stained with perspiration, and grave with the bottomless gravity of small necessary toils, a heavy French peasant was cutting wood with a hatchet. His cart stood a few yards off, already half full of timber; and the horse that cropped the grass was, like his master, valorous but not desperate; like his master, he was even prosperous, but yet was almost sad. The man was a Norman, taller than the average of the French and very angular; and his swarthy figure stood dark against a square of sunlight, almost like some allegoric figure of labour frescoed on a ground of gold.

"Mr. Syme is saying," called out Ratcliffe to the French Colonel, "that this man, at least, will never be an anarchist."

"Mr. Syme is right enough there," answered Colonel Ducroix, laughing, "if only for the reason that he has plenty of property to defend. But I forgot that in your country you are not used to peasants being wealthy."

"He looks poor," said Dr. Bull doubtfully.

"Quite so," said the Colonel; "that is why he is rich."

"I have an idea," called out Dr. Bull suddenly; "how much would he take to give us a lift in his cart? Those dogs are all on foot, and we could soon leave them behind."

"Oh, give him anything!" said Syme eagerly. "I have piles of money on me."

"That will never do," said the Colonel; "he will never have any respect for you unless you drive a bargain."

"Oh, if he haggles!" began Bull impatiently.

"He haggles because he is a free man," said the other. "You do not understand; he would not see the meaning of generosity. He is not being tipped."

AND even while they seemed to hear the heavy feet of their strange pursuers behind them, they had to stand and stamp while the French Colonel talked to the French wood-cutter with all the leisurely badinage and bickering of market-day. At the end of the four minutes, however, they saw that the Colonel was right, for the wood-cutter entered into their plans, not with the vague servility of a tout too-well paid, but with the seriousness of a solicitor who had been paid the proper fee. He told them that the best thing they could do was to make their way down to the little inn on the hills above Lancy, where the innkeeper, an old soldier who had become *dévot* in his latter years, would be certain to sympathise with them, and even to take risks in their support. The whole company, therefore, piled themselves on top of the stacks of wood, and went rocking in the rude cart down the other and steeper side of the woodland. Heavy and ramshackle as was the vehicle, it was driven quickly enough, and they soon had the exhilarating impression of distancing altogether those, whoever they were, who were hunting them. For, after all, the riddle as to where the anarchists had got all these followers was still unsolved. One man's presence had sufficed

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for them; they had fled at the first sight of the deformed smile of the Secretary. Syme every now and then looked back over his shoulder at the army on their track.

As the wood grew first thinner and then smaller with distance, he could see the sunlit slopes beyond it and above it; and across these was still moving the square black mob like one monstrous beetle. In the very strong sunlight and with his own very strong eyes, which were almost telescopic, Syme could see this mass of men quite plainly. He could see them as separate human figures; but he was increasingly surprised by the way in which they moved as one man. They seemed to be dressed in dark clothes and plain hats, like any common crowd out of the streets; but they did not spread and sprawl and trail by various lines to the attack, as would be natural in an ordinary mob. They moved with a sort of dreadful and wicked woodenness, like a staring army of automatons.

Syme pointed this out to Ratcliffe.

"Yes," replied the policeman, "that's discipline. That's Sunday. He is perhaps five hundred miles off, but the fear of him is on all of them, like the finger of God. Yes, they are walking regularly; and you bet your boots that they are talking regularly, yes, and thinking regularly. But the one important thing for us is that they are disappearing regularly."

Syme nodded. It was true that the black patch of the pursuing men was growing smaller and smaller as the peasant belaboured his horse.

The level of the sunlit landscape, though flat as a whole, fell away on the farther side of the wood in billows of heavy slope towards the sea, in a way not unlike the lower slopes of the Sussex downs. The only difference was that in Sussex the road would have been broken and angular like a little brook, but here the white French road fell sheer in front of them like a waterfall. Down this direct descent the cart clattered at a considerable angle, and in a few minutes, the road growing yet steeper, they saw below them the little harbour of Lancy and a great blue arc of the sea. The travelling cloud of their enemies had wholly disappeared from the horizon.

The horse and cart took a sharp turn round a clump of elms, and the horse's nose nearly struck the face of an old gentleman who was sitting on the benches outside the little café of "Le Soleil d'Or." The peasant grunted an apology, and got down from his seat. The others also descended one by one, and spoke to the old gentleman with fragmentary phrases of courtesy, for it was quite evident from his expansive manner that he was the owner of the little tavern.

He was a white-haired, apple-faced old boy, with sleepy eyes and a grey moustache; stout, sedentary, and very innocent, of a type that may often be found in France, but is still commoner in Catholic Germany. Everything about him, his pipe, his pot of beer, his flowers, his beehive, suggested an ancestral peace; only when his visitors looked up as they entered the inn-parlour, they saw the sword upon the wall.

THE Colonel, who greeted the innkeeper as an old friend, passed rapidly into the inn-parlour, and sat down ordering some ritual refreshment. The military decision of his action interested Syme, who sat next to him, and he took the opportunity when the old innkeeper had gone out of satisfying his curiosity.

"May I ask you, Colonel," he said in a low voice, "why we have come here?"

Colonel Ducroix smiled behind his bristly white moustache.

"For two reasons, sir," he said; "and I will give first, not the most important, but the most utilitarian. We came here because this is the only place within twenty miles in which we can get horses."

"Horses!" repeated Syme, looking up quickly.

"Yes," replied the other; "if you people are really to distance your enemies it is horses or nothing for you, unless of course you have bicycles and motor-cars in your pocket."

"And where do you advise us to make for?" asked Syme doubtfully."

"Beyond question," replied the Colonel; "you had better make all haste to the police station beyond the town. My friend, whom I seconded under somewhat deceptive circumstances, seems to me to exaggerate very much the possibilities of a general rising; but even he would hardly maintain, I suppose, that you were not safe with the gendarmes."

Syme nodded gravely; then he said abruptly—

"And your other reason for coming here?"

"My other reason for coming here,"

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said Ducroix soberly, "is that it is just as well to see a good man or two when one is possibly near to death."

Syme looked up at the wall, and saw a crudely-painted and pathetic religious picture. Then he said—

"You are right," and then almost immediately afterwards, "Has any one seen about the horses?"

"Yes," answered Ducroix, "you may be quite certain that I gave orders the moment I came in. Those enemies of yours gave no impression of hurry, but they were really moving wonderfully fast, like a well-trained army. I had no idea that the anarchists had so much discipline. You have not a moment to waste."

By Ducroix's advice the five others equipped themselves with some portable form of food and wine, and keeping their duelling swords as the only weapons available, they clattered away down the steep, white road. The two servants, who had carried the Marquis's luggage when he was a marquis, were left behind to drink at the café by common consent, and not at all against their own inclination.

By this time the afternoon sun was slanting westward, and by its rays Syme could see the sturdy figure of the old innkeeper growing smaller and smaller, but still standing and looking after them quite silently, the sunshine in his silver hair. Syme had a fixed, superstitious fancy, left in his mind by the chance phrase of the Colonel, that this was indeed, perhaps, the last honest stranger whom he should ever see upon the earth.

He was still looking at this dwindling figure, which stood as a mere grey blot touched with a white flame against the great green wall of the steep down behind him. And as he stared, over the top of the down behind the innkeeper, there appeared an army of black-clad and marching men. They seemed to hang above the good man and his house like a black cloud of locusts.

The horses had been saddled none too soon.

CHAPTER XII

THE EARTH IN ANARCHY

URGING the horses to a gallop, without respect to the rather rugged descent of the road, the horsemen soon regained their advantage over the men on the march, and at last the bulk of the first buildings of Lancy cut off the sight of their pursuers. Nevertheless, the ride had been a long one, and by the time they reached the real town the west was warming with the colour and quality of sunset.

The Colonel suggested that, before making finally for the police station, they should make the effort, in passing, to attach to themselves one more individual who might be useful.

"Four out of the five rich men in this town," he said, "are common swindlers. I suppose the proportion is pretty equal all over the world.

The fifth is a friend of mine, and a very fine fellow; and what is even more important from our point of view, he owns a motor car."

"I am afraid," said the Professor in his mirthful way, looking back along the white road on which the black, crawling patch might appear at any moment, "I am afraid we have hardly time for afternoon calls."

"Doctor Renard's house is only three minutes off," said the Colonel. His face was a little gray.

"Our danger," said Dr. Bull, "is not two minutes off."

"Yes," said Syme, "if we ride on fast we must leave them behind, for they are on foot."

"He has a motor-car," said the Colonel.

"But we may not get it," said Bull.

"Yes, he is quite on your side."

"But he might be out."

"Hold your tongue," said Syme suddenly. "What is that noise?"

For a second they all sat as still as equestrian statues, and for a second—for two or three or four seconds—heaven and earth seemed equally still. Then all their ears, in an agony of attention, heard along the road that indescribable thrill and throb that means only one thing—horses!

The Colonel's face had an instantaneous change, as if lightning had struck it, and yet left it scatheless.

"They have done us," he said, with brief military irony. "Prepare to receive cavalry!"

"Where can they have got the horses?" asked Syme, as he mechanically urged his steed to a canter.

The Colonel was silent for a little, then he said in a strained voice—

"I was speaking with strict accuracy when I said that the 'Soleil d'Or' was

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the only place where one can get horses within twenty miles."

"No!" said Syme violently, "I don't believe he'd do it. Not with all that white hair."

"He may have been forced," said the Colonel gently. "They must be at least a hundred strong, for which reason we are all going to see my friend Renard, who has a motor-car."

With these words he swung his horse suddenly round a street corner, and went down the street with such thundering speed, that the others, though already well at the gallop, had difficulty in following the flying tail of his horse.

Dr. Renard inhabited a high and comfortable house at the top of a steep street, so that when the riders alighted at his door they could once more see the solid green ridge of the hill, with the white road across it, standing up above all the roofs of the town. They breathed again to see that the road as yet was clear, and they rang the bell.

Dr. Renard was a beaming, brown-bearded man, a good example of that silent but very busy professional class which France has preserved even more perfectly than England. When the matter was explained to him he pooh-poohed the panic of the ex-Marquis altogether; he said, with the solid French scepticism, that there was no conceivable probability of a general anarchist rising. "Anarchy," he said, shrugging his shoulders, "it is childishness!"

"*Et ça,*" cried out the Colonel suddenly, pointing over the other's shoulder, "and that is childishness, isn't it?"

THEY all looked around, and saw a curve of black cavalry come sweeping over the top of the hill with all the energy of Attila. Swiftly as they rode, however, the whole rank still kept well together, and they could see the black vizards of the first line as level as a line of uniforms. But although the main black square was the same, though traveling faster, there was now one sensational difference which they could see clearly upon the slope of the hill, as if upon a slanted map. The bulk of the riders were in one block; but one rider flew far ahead of the column, and with frantic movements of hand and heel urged his horse faster and faster, so that one might have fancied that he was not the pursuer but the pursued. But even at that great distance they could see something so fanatical, so unquestionable in his figure, that they knew it was the Secretary himself.

"I am sorry to cut short a cultured discussion," said the Colonel, "but can you lend me your motorcar now, in two minutes?"

"I have a suspicion that you are all mad," said Dr. Renard, smiling sociably; "but God forbid that madness should in any way interrupt friendship. Let us go round to the garage."

Dr. Renard was a mild man with monstrous wealth; his rooms were like the Musée de Cluny, and he had three motor-cars. These, however, he seemed to use very sparingly, having the simple tastes of the French middle class, and when his impatient friends came to examine them, it took them some time to assure themselves that one of them even could be made to work. This with some difficulty they brought round into the street before the Doctor's house. When they came out of the dim garage they were startled to find that twilight had already fallen with the abruptness of night in the tropics. Either they had been longer in the place than they imagined, or some unusual canopy of cloud had gathered over the town.

They looked down the steep streets, and seemed to see a slight mist coming up from the sea.

"It is now or never," said Dr. Bull. "I hear horses."

"No," corrected the Professor, "a horse."

And as they listened, it was evident that the noise, rapidly coming nearer on the rattling stones, was not the noise of the whole cavalcade but that of the one horseman, who had left it far behind—the insane Secretary.

Syme's family, like most of those who end in the simple life, had once owned a motor, and he knew all about them. He had leapt at once into the chauffeur's seat, and with flushed face was wrenching and tugging at the disused machinery. He bent his strength upon one handle, and then said quite quietly—

"I am afraid it's no go."

As he spoke, there swept round the corner a man, rigid on his rushing horse, with the rush and rigidity of an arrow. He had a smile that thrust out his chin as if it were dislocated. He swept alongside of the stationary car, into which its company had crowded, and laid his hand on the front. It was the Secretary, and his mouth went quite straight in the solemnity of triumph.

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Syme was leaning hard upon the steering wheel, and there was no sound but the rumble of the other pursuers riding into the town. Then there came quite suddenly a scream of scraping iron, and the car leapt forward. It plucked the Secretary clean out of his saddle, as a knife is whipped out of its sheath, trailed him kicking terribly for twenty yards, and left him flung flat upon the road far in front of his frightened horse. As the car took the corner of the street with a splendid curve, they could just see the other anarchists filling the street and raising their fallen leader.

"I can't understand why it has grown so dark," said the Professor at last.

"Going to be a storm, I think," said Dr. Bull. "I say, it's a pity we haven't got a light on this car, if only to see by."

"We have," said the Colonel, and from the floor of the car he fished up a heavy, old-fashioned, carved iron lantern with a light inside it. It was obviously an antique, and it would seem as if its original use had been in some way semi-religious, for there was a rude moulding of a cross upon one of its sides.

"Where on earth did you get that?" asked the Professor.

"I got it where I got the car," answered the Colonel, chuckling, "from my best friend. While our friend here was fighting with the steering wheel, I ran up the front steps of the house and spoke to Renard, who was standing in his own porch, you will remember. 'I suppose,' I said, 'there's no time to get a lamp.' He looked up, blinking amiably at the beautiful arched ceiling of his own front hall. From this was suspended, by chains of exquisite ironwork, this lantern, one of the hundred treasures of his treasure house. By sheer force he tore the lamp out of his own ceiling, shattering the painted panels, and bringing down two blue vases with his violence. Then he handed me the iron lantern, and I put it in the car. Was I not right when I said that Dr. Renard was worth knowing?"

"You were," said Syme seriously, and hung the heavy lantern over the front. There was a certain allegory of their whole position in the contrast between the modern automobile and its strange, ecclesiastical lamp.

HITHERTO they had passed through the quietest part of the town, meeting at most one or two pedestrians, who could give them no hint of the peace or the hostility of the place. Now, however, the windows in the houses began one by one to be lit up, giving a greater sense of habitation and humanity. Dr. Bull turned to the new detective who had led their flight, and permitted himself one of his natural and friendly smiles.

"These lights make one feel more cheerful."

Inspector Ratcliffe drew his brows together.

"There is only one set of lights that make me more cheerful," he said, "and they are those lights of the police station which I can see beyond the town. Please God we may be there within ten minutes."

Then all Bull's boiling good sense and optimism broke suddenly out of him.

"Oh, this is all raving nonsense!" he cried. "If you really think that ordinary people in ordinary houses are anarchists, you must be madder than an anarchist yourself. If we turned and fought these fellows, the whole town would fight for us."

"No," said the other with an immovable simplicity, "the whole town would fight for them. We shall see."

While they were speaking the Professor had leant forward with sudden excitement.

"What is that noise?" he said.

"Oh, the horses behind us, I suppose," said the Colonel. "I thought we had got clear of them."

"The horses behind us! No," said the Professor, "it is not horses, and it is not behind us."

Almost as he spoke, across the end of the street before them two shining and rattling shapes shot past. They were gone almost in a flash, but every one could see that they were motor-cars, and the Professor stood up with a pale face and swore that they were the other two motor-cars from Dr. Renard's garage.

"I tell you they were his," he repeated, with wild eyes, "and they were full of men in masks!"

"Absurd!" said the Colonel. "Dr. Renard would never give them his cars."

"He may have been forced," said Ratcliffe quietly. "The whole town is on their side."

"You still believe that?" asked the Colonel incredulously.

"You will all believe it soon," said the other with a hopeless calm.

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There was a puzzled pause for some little time, and then the Colonel began again abruptly—

"No, I can't believe it. The thing is nonsense. The plain people of a peaceable French town—"

He was cut short by a bang and a blaze of light, which seemed close to his eyes. As the car sped on it left a floating patch of white smoke behind it, and Syme had heard a shot shriek past his ear.

"My God!" said the Colonel, "some one has shot at us."

"It need not interrupt conversation," said the gloomy Ratcliffe. "Pray resume your remarks, Colonel. You were talking, I think, about the plain people of a peaceable French town."

The staring Colonel was long past minding satire. He rolled his eyes all round the street.

"It is extraordinary," he said, "most extraordinary."

"A fastidious person," said Syme, "might even call it unpleasant. However, I suppose those lights out in the field beyond this street are the Gendarmerie. We shall soon get there."

"No," said Inspector Ratcliffe, "we shall never get there."

He had been standing up and looking keenly ahead of him. Now he sat down and smoothed his sleek hair with a weary gesture.

"What do you mean?" asked Bull sharply.

"I mean that we shall never get there," said the pessimist placidly. "They have two rows of armed men across the road already; I can see them from here. The town is in arms, as I said it was. I can only wallow in the exquisite comfort of my own exactitude."

And Ratcliffe sat down comfortably in the car and lit a cigarette, but the others rose excitedly and stared down the road. Syme had slowed down the car as their plans became doubtful, and he brought it finally to a standstill just at the corner of a side street that ran down very steeply to the sea.

THE town was mostly in shadow, but the sun had not sunk; wherever its level light could break through, it painted everything a burning gold. Up this side street the last sunset light shone as sharp and narrow as the shaft of artificial light at the theatre. It struck the car of the five friends, and lit it like a burning chariot. But the rest of the street, especially the two ends of it, was in the deepest twilight, and for some seconds they could see nothing.

Then Syme, whose eyes were the keenest, broke into a little bitter whistle, and said—

"It is quite true. There is a crowd or an army or some such thing across the end of that street."

"Well, if there is," said Bull impatiently, "it must be something else—a sham fight or the mayor's birthday or something. I cannot and will not believe that plain, jolly people in a place like this walk about with dynamite in their pockets. Get on a bit, Syme, and let us look at them."

The car crawled about a hundred yards farther, and then they were all startled by Dr. Bull breaking into a high crow of laughter.

"Why, you silly mugs!" he cried, "what did I tell you. That crowd's as law-abiding as a cow, and if it weren't, it's on our side."

"How do you know?" asked the Professor, staring.

"You blind bat," cried Bull, "don't you see who is leading them?"

They peered again, and then the Colonel, with a catch in his voice, cried out—

"Why, it's Renard!"

There was, indeed, a rank of dim figures running across the road, and they could not be clearly seen; but far enough in front to catch the accident of the evening light was stalking up and down the unmistakable Dr. Renard, in a white hat, stroking his long brown beard, and holding a revolver in his left hand.

"What a fool I've been!" exclaimed the Colonel. "Of course, the dear old boy has turned out to help us."

Dr. Bull was bubbling over with laughter, swinging the sword in his hand as carelessly as a cane. He jumped out of the car and ran across the intervening space, calling out—

"Dr. Renard! Dr. Renard!"

An instant after Syme thought his own eyes had gone mad in his head. For the philanthropic Dr. Renard had deliberately raised his revolver and fired twice at Bull, so that the shots rang down the road.

Almost at the same second as the puff of white cloud went up from this atrocious explosion a long puff of white cloud went up also from the cigarette of the cynical Ratcliffe. Like all the rest he

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turned a little pale, but he smiled. Dr. Bull, at whom the bullets had been fired, just missing his scalp, stood quite still in the middle of the road without a sign of fear, and then turned very slowly and crawled back to the car, and climbed in with two holes through his hat.

"Well," said the cigarette smoker slowly, "what do you think now?"

"I think," said Dr. Bull with precision, "that I am lying in bed at No. 217 Peabody Buildings, and that I shall soon wake up with a jump; or, if that's not it, I think that I am sitting in a small cushioned cell in Hanwell, and that the doctor can't make much of my case. But if you want to know what I don't think, I'll tell you. I don't think what you think. I don't think, and I never shall think, that the mass of ordinary men are a pack of dirty modern thinkers. No, sir, I'm a democrat, and I still don't believe that Sunday could convert one average navvy or counter-jumper. No, I may be mad, but humanity isn't."

Syme turned his bright blue eyes on Bull with an earnestness which he did not commonly make clear.

"You are a very fine fellow," he said. "You can believe in a sanity which is not merely your sanity. And you're right enough about humanity, about peasants and people like that jolly old innkeeper. But you're not right about Renard. I suspected him from the first. He's rationalistic, and, what's worse, he's rich. When duty and religion are really destroyed, it will be by the rich."

"They are really destroyed now," said the man with a cigarette, and rose with his hands in his pockets. "The devils are coming on!"

The men in the motor-car looked anxiously in the direction of his dreamy gaze, and they saw that the whole regiment at the end of the road was advancing upon them, Dr. Renard marching furiously in front, his beard flying in the breeze.

The Colonel sprang out of the car with an intolerant exclamation.

"Gentlemen," he cried, "the thing is incredible. It must be a practical joke. If you knew Renard as I do—it's like calling Queen Victoria a dynamiter. If you had got the man's character into your head—"

"Dr. Bull," said Syme sardonically, "has at least got it into his hat."

"I tell you it can't be!" cried the Colonel, stamping. "Renard shall explain it. He shall explain it to me," and he strode forward.

"Don't be in such a hurry," drawled the smoker. "He will very soon explain it to all of us."

But the impatient Colonel was already out of earshot, advancing towards the advancing enemy. The excited Dr. Renard lifted his pistol again, but perceiving his opponent, hesitated, and the Colonel came face to face with him with frantic gestures of remonstrance.

"It is no good," said Syme. "He will never get anything out of that old heathen. I vote we drive bang through the thick of them, bang as the bullets went through Bull's hat. We may all be killed, but we must kill a tidy number of them."

"I won't 'ave it," said Dr. Bull, growing more vulgar in the sincerity of his virtue. "The poor chaps may be making a mistake. Give the Colonel a chance."

"Shall we go back, then?" asked the Professor.

"No," said Ratcliffe in a cold voice, "the street behind us is held too. In fact, I seem to see there another friend of yours, Syme."

Syme spun round smartly, and stared backwards at the track which they had travelled. He saw an irregular body of horsemen gathering and galloping towards them in the gloom. He saw above the foremost saddle the silver gleam of a sword, and then as it grew nearer the silver gleam of an old man's hair. The next moment, with shattering violence, he had swung the motor round and sent it dashing down the steep side street to the sea.

"What the devil is up?" cried the Professor, seizing his arm.

"The morning star has fallen!" said Syme, as his own car went down the darkness like a falling star.

THE others did not understand his words, but when they looked back at the street above they saw the hostile cavalry coming round the corner and down the slopes after them; and foremost of all rode the good innkeeper, flushed with the fiery innocence of the evening light.

"The world is insane!" said the Professor, and buried his face in his hands.

"No," said Dr. Bull in adamantine humility, "it is I."

"What are we going to do?" asked the Professor.

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"At this moment," said Syme, with a scientific detachment, "I think we are going to smash into a lamp-post."

The next instant the automobile had come with a catastrophic jar against an iron object. The instant after that four men had crawled out from under a chaos of metal, and a tall, lean lamp-post that had stood up straight on the edge of the marine parade stood out, bent and twisted, like the branch of an old broken tree.

They went at such a rate that Syme saw the Albert Hall in Kensington when he thought he was still in Paddington

"Well, we smashed something," said the Professor, with a faint smile. "That's some comfort."

"You're becoming an anarchist," said Syme, dusting his clothes with his instinct of daintiness.

"Every one is," said Ratcliffe.

As they spoke, the white-haired horseman and his followers came thundering from above, and almost at the same moment a dark string of men ran shouting along the sea-front. Syme snatched a sword, and took it in his teeth; he stuck two others under his arm-pits, took a fourth in his left hand and the lantern in his right, and leapt off the high parade on to the beach below.

The others leapt after him, with a common acceptance of such decisive action, leaving the debris and the gathering mob above them.

"We have one more chance," said Syme, taking the steel out of his mouth. "Whatever all this pandemonium means, I suppose the police station will help us. We can't get there, for they hold the way. But there's a pier or breakwater runs out into the sea just here, which we could defend longer than anything else, like Horatius and his bridge. We must defend it till the Gendarmerie turn out. Keep after me."

They followed him as he went crunching down the beach, and in a second or two their boots broke not on the sea gravel, but on broad, flat stones. They marched down a long, low jetty, running out in one arm into the dim, boiling sea, and when they came to the end of it they felt that they had come to the end of their story. They turned and faced the town.

That town was transfigured with uproar. All along the high parade from which they had just descended was a dark and roaring stream of humanity, with tossing arms and fiery faces, groping and glaring towards them. The long

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dark line was dotted with torches and lanterns; but even where no flame lit up a furious face, they could see in the farthest figure, in the most shadowy gesture, an organised hate. It was clear that they were the accursed of all men, and they knew not why.

Two or three men, looking little and black like monkeys, leapt over the edge as they had done and dropped on to the beach. These came ploughing down the deep sand, shouting horribly, and strove to wade into the sea at random. The example was followed, and the whole black mass of men began to run and drip over the edge like black treacle.

Foremost among the men on the beach Syme saw the peasant who had driven their cart. He splashed into the surf on a huge cart-horse, and shook his axe at them.

"The peasant!" cried Syme. "They have not risen since the Middle Ages."

"Even if the police do come now," said the Professor mournfully, "they can do nothing with this mob."

"Nonsense!" said Bull desperately; "there must be some people left in the town who are human."

"No," said the hopeless Inspector, "the human being will soon be extinct. We are the last of mankind."

"It may be," said the Professor. Then he added in his dreamy voice, "What is that at the end of the 'Dunciad'?"

" 'Nor public flame, nor private, dares to shine
Nor human life is left, nor glimpse divine!
Lo! thy dread Empire, Chaos, is restored;
Light dies before thine uncreating word:
Thy hand, great Anarch, lets the curtain fall;
And universal darkness buries all.' "

"Stop!" cried Bull suddenly, "the gendarmes are out."

The low lights of the police station were indeed blotted and broken with hurrying figures.

"They are charging the mob!" cried Bull in ecstasy or alarm.

"No," said Syme, "they are formed along the parade."

"They have unslung their carbines," cried Bull, dancing with excitement.

"Yes," said Ratcliffe, "and they are going to fire on us."

AS HE spoke there came a long crackle of musketry, and bullets seemed to hop like hailstones on the stones in front of them.

"The gendarmes have joined them!" cried the Professor, and struck his forehead.

"I am in the padded cell," said Bull solidly.

There was a long silence, and then Ratcliffe said, looking out over the swollen sea, all a sort of grey purple—

"What does it matter who is mad or who is sane? We shall all be dead soon."

Syme turned to him and said—

"You are quite hopeless, then?"

Mr. Ratcliffe kept a stony silence; then at last he said quietly—

"No; oddly enough I am not quite hopeless. There is one insane little hope that I cannot get out of my mind.

"The power of this whole planet is against us, yet I cannot help wondering whether this one silly little hope is hopeless yet."

"In what or whom is your hope?" asked Syme with curiosity.

"In a man I never saw," said the other, looking at the leaden sea.

"I know what you mean," said Syme in a low voice, "the man in the dark room. But Sunday must have killed him by now."

"Perhaps," said the other steadily; "but if so, he was the only man whom Sunday found it hard to kill."

"I heard what you said," said the Professor, with his back turned. "I also am holding hard on to the thing I never saw."

All of a sudden Syme, who was standing as if blind with introspective thought, swung round and cried out, like a man waking from sleep—

"Where is the Colonel? I thought he was with us!"

"The Colonel! Yes," cried Bull, "where on earth is the Colonel?"

"He went to speak to Renard," said the Professor.

"We cannot leave him among all those beasts," cried Syme. "Let us die like gentlemen if—"

"Do not pity the Colonel," said Ratcliffe, with a pale sneer. "He is extremely comfortable. He is—"

"No! no! no!" cried Syme in a kind of frenzy, "not the Colonel too! I will never believe it!"

"Will you believe your eyes?" asked the other, and pointed to the beach.

Many of their pursuers had waded into the water shaking their fists, but the sea was rough, and they could not reach the pier. Two or three figures, however, stood

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on the beginning of the stone footway, and seemed to be cautiously advancing down it. The glare of a chance lantern lit up the faces of the two foremost. One face wore a black half-mask and under it the mouth was twisting about in such a madness of nerves that the black tuft of beard wriggled round and round like a restless, living thing. The other was the red face and white moustache of Colonel Ducroix. They were in earnest consultation.

"Yes, he is gone too," said the Professor, and sat down on a stone. "Everything's gone. I'm gone! I can't trust my own bodily machinery. I feel as if my own hand might fly up and strike me."

"When my hand flies up," said Syme, "it will strike somebody else," and he strode along the pier towards the Colonel, the sword in one hand and the lantern in the other.

AS IF to destroy the last hope or doubt, the Colonel, who saw him coming, pointed his revolver at him and fired. The shot missed Syme, but struck his sword, breaking it short at the hilt. Syme rushed on, and swung the iron lantern above his head.

"Judas before Herod!" he said, and struck the Colonel down upon the stones. Then he turned to the Secretary, whose frightful mouth was almost foaming now, and held the lamp high with so rigid and arresting a gesture, that the man was, as it were, frozen for a moment, and forced to hear.

"Do you see this lantern?" cried Syme in a terrible voice. "Do you see the cross carved on it, and the flame inside? You did not make it. You did not light it. Better men than you, men who could believe and obey, twisted the entrails of iron and preserved the legend of fire. There is not a street you walk on, there is not a thread you wear, that was not made as this lantern was, by denying your philosophy of dirt and rats. You can make nothing. You can only destroy. You will destroy mankind; you will destroy the world. Let that suffice you. Yet this one old Christian lantern you shall not destroy. It shall go where your empire of apes will never have the wit to find it."

He struck the Secretary once with the lantern so that he staggered; and then, whirling it twice round his head, sent it flying far out to sea, where it flared like a roaring rocket and fell.

"Swords!" shouted Syme, turning his flaming face to the three behind him. "Let us charge these dogs, for our time has come to die."

His three companions came after him sword in hand. Symes' sword was broken, but he rent a bludgeon from the fist of a fisherman, flinging him down. In a moment they would have flung themselves upon the face of the mob and perished, when an interruption came. The Secretary, ever since Syme's speech, had stood with his hand to his stricken head as if dazed; now he suddenly pulled off his black mask.

The pale face thus peeled in the lamplight revealed not so much rage as astonishment.

He put up his hand with an anxious authority.

"There is some mistake," he said. "Mr. Syme, I hardly think you understand your position. I arrest you in the name of the law."

"Of the law?" said Syme, and dropped his stick.

"Certainly!" said the Secretary. "I am a detective from Scotland Yard," and he took a small blue card from his coat pocket.

"And what do you suppose we are?" asked the Professor, and threw up his arms.

"You," said the Secretary stiffly, "are, as I know for a fact, member of the Supreme Anarchist Council. Disguised as one of you, I—"

Dr. Bull tossed his sword into the sea.

"There never was any Supreme Anarchist Council," he said. "We were all a lot of silly policemen looking at each other. And all these nice people who have been peppering us with shot thought we were the dynamiters. I knew I couldn't be wrong about the mob," he said, beaming over the enormous multitude, which stretched away to the distance on both sides. "Vulgar people are never mad. I'm vulgar myself, and I know. I am now going on shore to stand a drink to everybody here."

CHAPTER XIII

THE PURSUIT OF THE PRESIDENT

NEXT morning five bewildered but hilarious people took the boat for Dover. The poor old Colonel might have had some cause to complain, having been first forced to fight for two fac-

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tions that didn't exist, and then knocked down with an iron lantern. But he was a magnanimous old gentleman, and being much relieved that neither party had anything to do with dynamite, he saw them off on the pier with great geniality.

The five reconciled detectives had a hundred details to explain to each other. The Secretary had to tell Syme how they had come to wear masks originally in order to approach the supposed enemy as fellow-conspirators; Syme had to explain how they had fled with such swiftness through a civilised country. But above all these matters of detail which could be explained, rose the central mountain of the matter that they could not explain. What did it all mean? If they were all harmless officers, what was Sunday? If he had not seized the world, what on earth had he been up to? Inspector Ratcliffe was still gloomy about this.

"I can't make head or tail of old Sunday's little game any more than you can," he said. "But whatever else Sunday is, he isn't a blameless citizen. Damn it! do you remember his face?"

"I grant you," answered Syme, "that I have never been able to forget it."

"Well," said the Secretary, "I suppose we can find out soon, for to-morrow we have our next general meeting. You will excuse me," he said, with a rather ghastly smile, "for being well acquainted with my secretarial duties."

"I suppose you are right," said the Professor reflectively. "I suppose we might find it out from him; but I confess that I should feel a bit afraid of asking Sunday who he really is."

"Why," asked the Secretary, "for fear of bombs?"

"No," said the Professor, "for fear he might tell me."

"Let us have some drinks," said Dr. Bull, after a silence.

Throughout their whole journey by boat and train they were highly convivial, but they instinctively kept together. Dr. Bull, who had always been the optimist of the party, endeavoured to persuade the other four that the whole company could take the same hansom cab from Victoria; but this was overruled, and they went in a four-wheeler, with Dr. Bull on the box, singing. They finished their journey at an hotel in Piccadilly Circus, so as to be close to the early breakfast next morning in Leicester Square. Yet even then the adventures of the day were not entirely over. Dr. Bull, discontented with the general proposal to go to bed, had strolled out of the hotel at about eleven to see and taste some of the beauties of London. Twenty minutes afterwards, however, he came back and made quite a clamour in the hall. Syme, who tried at first to soothe him, was forced at last to listen to his communication with quite a new attention.

"I tell you I've seen him!" said Dr. Bull, with thick emphasis.

"Whom?" asked Syme quickly. "Not the President?"

"Not so bad as that," said Dr. Bull, with unnecessary laughter, "not so bad as that. I've got him here."

"Got whom here?" asked Syme impatiently.

"Hairy man," said the other lucidly, "man that used to be hairy man—Gogol. Here he is," and he pulled forward by a reluctant elbow the identical young man who five days before had marched out of the Council with thin red hair and a pale face, the first of all the sham anarchists who had been exposed.

"Why do you worry with me?" he cried. "You have expelled me as a spy."

"We are all spies!" whispered Syme.

"We're all spies!" shouted Dr. Bull. "Come and have a drink."

Next morning the battalion of the reunited six marched stolidly towards the hotel in Leicester Square.

"This is more cheerful," said Dr. Bull; "we are six men going to ask one man what he means."

"I think it is a bit queerer than that." said Syme. "I think it is six men going to ask one man what they mean."

THEY turned in silence into the Square, and though the hotel was in the opposite corner, they saw at once the little balcony and a figure that looked too big for it. He was sitting alone with bent head, poring over a newspaper. But all his councillors, who had come to vote him down, crossed that square as if they were watched out of heaven by a hundred eyes.

They had disputed much upon their policy, about whether they should leave the unmasked Gogol without and begin diplomatically, or whether they should bring him in and blow up the gunpowder at once. The influence of Syme and Bull prevailed for the latter course, though the Secretary to the last asked them why they attacked Sunday so rashly.

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"My reason is quite simple," said Syme. "I attack him rashly because I am afraid of him."

They followed Syme up the dark stair in silence, and they all came out simultaneously into the broad sunlight of Sunday's smile.

"Delightful!" he said. "So pleased to see you all. What an exquisite day it is. Is the Czar dead?"

The Secretary, who happened to be foremost, drew himself together for a dignified outburst.

"No, sir," he said sternly, "there has been no massacre. I bring you news of no such disgusting spectacles."

"Disgusting spectacles?" repeated the President, with a bright, inquiring smile. "You mean Dr. Bull's spectacles?"

The Secretary choked for a moment, and the President went on with a sort of smooth appeal—

"Of course, we all have our opinions and even our eyes, but really to call them disgusting before the man himself—"

Dr. Bull tore off his spectacles and broke them on the table.

"My spectacles are blackguardly," he said, "but I'm not. Look at my face."

"I dare say it's the sort of face that grows on one," said the President, "in fact, it grows on you; and who am I to quarrel with the wild fruits upon the Tree of Life? I dare say it will grow on me some day."

"We have no time for tomfoolery," said the Secretary, breaking in savagely. "We have come to know what all this means. Who are you? What are you? Why did you get us all here? Do you know who and what we are? Are you a half-witted man playing the conspirator, or are you a clever man playing the fool? Answer me, I tell you."

"Candidates," murmured Sunday, "are only required to answer eight out of the seventeen questions on the paper. As far as I can make out, you want me to tell you what I am, and what you are, and what this table is, and what this Council is, and what this world is for all I know. Well, I will go so far as to rend the veil of one mystery. If you want to know what you are, you are a set of highly well-intentioned young jackasses."

"And you," said Syme, leaning forward, "what are you?"

"I? What am I?" roared the President, and he rose slowly to an incredible height, like some enormous wave about to arch above them and break. "You want to know what I am, do you? Bull, you are a man of science. Grub in the roots of those trees and find out the truth about them. Syme, you are a poet. Stare at those morning clouds, and tell me or any one the truth about morning clouds. But I tell you this, that you will have found out the truth of the last tree and the topmost cloud before the truth about me. You will understand the sea, and I shall be still a riddle; you shall know what the stars are, and not know what I am. Since the beginning of the world all men have hunted me like a wolf—kings and sages, and poets and law-givers, all the churches, and all the philosophies. But I have never been caught yet, and the skies will fall in the time I turn to bay. I have given them a good run for their money, and I will now."

Before one of them could move, the monstrous man had swung himself like some huge ourang-outang over the balustrade of the balcony. Yet before he dropped he pulled himself up again as on a horizontal bar, and thrusting his great chin over the edge of the balcony, said solemnly—

"There's one thing I'll tell you though about who I am. I am the man in the dark room, who made you all policemen."

With that he fell from the balcony, bouncing on the stones below like a great ball of india-rubber, and went bounding off towards the corner of the Alhambra, where he hailed a hansom-cab and sprang inside it. The six detectives had been standing thunderstruck and livid in the light of his last assertion; but when he disappeared into the cab, Syme's practical senses returned to him, and leaping over the balcony so recklessly as almost to break his legs, he called another cab.

He and Bull sprang into the cab together, the Professor and the Inspector into another, while the Secretary and the late Gogol scrambled into a third just in time to pursue the flying Syme, who was pursuing the flying President. Sunday led them a wild chase towards the northwest, his cabman, evidently under the influence of more than common inducements, urging the horse at break-neck speed. But Syme was in no mood for delicacies, and he stood up in his own cab shouting, "Stop thief!" until crowds ran along beside his cab, and policemen began to stop and ask questions. All this had its influence upon the Presi-

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dent's cabman, who began to look dubious, and to slow down to a trot. He opened the trap to talk reasonably to his fare, and in so doing let the long whip droop over the front of the cab. Sunday leant forward, seized it, and jerked it violently out of the man's hand. Then standing up in front of the cab himself, he lashed the horse and roared aloud, so that they went down the streets like a flying storm. Through street after street and square after square went whirling this preposterous vehicle, in which the fare was urging the horse and the driver trying desperately to stop it. The other three cabs came after it (if the phrase be permissible of a cab) like panting hounds. Shops and streets shot by like rattling arrows.

AT THE highest ecstasy of speed, Sunday turned round on the splashboard where he stood, and sticking his great grinning head out of the cab, with white hair whistling in the wind, he made a horrible face at his pursuers, like some colossal urchin. Then raising his right hand swiftly, he flung a ball of paper in Syme's face and vanished. Syme caught the thing while instinctively warding it off, and discovered that it consisted of two crumpled papers. One was addressed to himself, and the other to Dr. Bull, with a very long, and it is to be feared partly ironical, string of letters after his name. Dr. Bull's address was, at any rate, considerably longer than his communication, for the communication consisted entirely of the words:—

"What about Martin Tupper *now?*"

"What does the old maniac mean?" asked Bull, staring at the words. "What does yours say, Syme?"

Syme's message was, at any rate, longer, and ran as follows:—

"No one would regret anything in the nature of an interference by the Archdeacon more than I. I trust it will not come to that. But, for the last time, where are your goloshes? The thing is too bad, especially after what uncle said."

The President's cabman seemed to be regaining some control over his horse, and the pursuers gained a little as they swept round into the Edgware Road. And here there occurred what seemed to the allies a providential stoppage. Traffic of every kind was swerving to right or left or stopping, for down the long road was coming the unmistakable roar announcing the fire-engine, which in a few seconds went by like a brazen thunderbolt. But quick as it went by, Sunday had bounded out of his cab, sprung at the fire-engine, caught it, slung himself on to it, and was seen as he disappeared in the noisy distance talking to the astonished fireman with explanatory gestures.

"After him!" howled Syme. "He can't go astray now. There's no mistaking a fire-engine."

The three cabmen, who had been stunned for a moment, whipped up their horses and slightly decreased the distance between themselves and their disappearing prey. The President acknowledged this proximity by coming to the back of the car, bowing repeatedly, kissing his hand, and finally flinging a neatly-folded note into the bosom of Inspector Ratcliffe. When that gentleman opened it, not without impatience, he found it contained the words:—

"Fly at once. The truth about your trouser-stretchers is known.—A FRIEND."

The fire-engine had struck still farther to the north, into a region that they did not recognise; and as it ran by a line of high railings shadowed with trees, the six friends were startled, but somewhat relieved, to see the President leap from the fire-engine, though whether through another whim or the increasing protest of his entertainers they could not see. Before the three cabs, however, could reach up to the spot, he had gone up the high railings like a huge grey cat, tossed himself over, and vanished in a darkness of leaves.

Syme with a furious gesture stopped his cab, jumped out, and sprang also to the escalade. When he had one leg over the fence and his friends were following, he turned a face on them which shone quite pale in the shadow.

"What place can this be?" he asked. "Can it be the old devil's house? I've heard he has a house in North London."

"All the better," said the Secretary grimly, planting a foot in a foothold, "we shall find him at home."

"No, but it isn't that," said Syme, knitting his brows. "I hear the most horrible noises, like devils laughing and sneezing and blowing their devilish noses!"

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"His dogs barking, of course," said the Secretary.

"Why not say his black-beetles barking!" said Syme furiously, "snails barking! geraniums barking! Did you ever hear a dog bark like that?"

He held up his hand, and there came out of the thicket a long, growling roar that seemed to get under the skin and freeze the flesh—a low thrilling roar that made a throbbing in the air all about them.

"The dogs of Sunday would be no ordinary dogs," said Gogol, and shuddered.

SYME had jumped down on the other side, but he still stood listening impatiently.

"Well, listen to that," he said, "is that a dog—anybody's dog?"

There broke upon their ear a hoarse screaming as of things protesting and clamouring in sudden pain; and then, far off like an echo, what sounded like a long nasal trumpet.

"Well, his house ought to be hell!" said the Secretary; "and if it is hell, I'm going in!" and he sprang over the tall railings almost with one swing.

The others followed. They broke through a tangle of plants and shrubs, and came out on an open path. Nothing was in sight, but Dr. Bull suddenly struck his hands together.

"Why, you asses," he cried, "it's the Zoo!"

As they were looking round wildly for any trace of their wild quarry, a keeper in uniform came running along the path with a man in plain clothes.

"Has it come this way?" gasped the keeper.

"Has what?" asked Syme.

"The elephant!" cried the keeper. "An elephant has gone mad and run away!"

"He has run away with an old gentleman," said the other stranger breathlessly, "a poor old gentleman with white hair!"

"What sort of old gentleman?" asked Syme, with great curiosity.

"A very large and fat old gentleman in light grey clothes," said the keeper eagerly.

"Well," said Syme, "if he's that particular kind of old gentleman, if you're quite sure that he's a large and fat old gentleman in grey clothes, you may take my word for it that the elephant has not run away with him. He has run away with the elephant. The elephant is not made by God that could run away with him if he did not consent to the elopement. And, by thunder, there he is!"

There was no doubt about it this time. Clean across the space of grass, about two hundred yards away, with a crowd screaming and scampering vainly at his heels, went a huge grey elephant at an awful stride, with his trunk thrown out as rigid as a ship's bowsprit, and trumpeting like the trumpet of doom. On the back of the bellowing and plunging animal sat President Sunday with all the placidity of a sultan, but goading the animal to a furious speed with some sharp object in his hand.

"Stop him!" screamed the populace. "He'll be out of the gate!"

"Stop a landslide!" said the keeper. "He is out of the gate!"

And even as he spoke, a final crash and roar of terror announced that the great grey elephant had broken out of the gates of the Zoological Gardens, and was careering down Albany Street like a new and swift sort of omnibus.

"Great Lord!" cried Bull, "I never knew an elephant could go so fast. Well, it must be hansom-cabs again if we are even to keep him in sight."

As they raced along to the gate out of which the elephant had vanished, Syme felt a glaring panorama of the strange animals in the cages which they passed. Afterwards he thought it queer that he should have seen them so clearly. He remembered especially seeing pelicans, with their preposterous, pendant throats. He wondered why the pelican was the symbol of charity, except it was that it wanted a good deal of charity to admire a pelican. He remembered a hornbill, which was simply a huge yellow beak with a small bird tied on behind it. The whole gave him a sensation, the vividness of which he could not explain, that Nature was always making quite mysterious jokes. Sunday had told them that they would understand him when they had understood the stars. He wondered whether even the archangels understood the hornbill.

The six unhappy detectives flung themselves into cabs and followed the elephant, sharing the terror which he spread through the long stretch of the streets. This time Sunday did not turn round, but offered them the solid stretch of his unconscious back, which maddened them, if possible, more than his previous mockeries. Just before they came to

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Baker Street, however, he was seen to throw something far up into the air, as a boy does a ball meaning to catch it again. But at their rate of racing it fell far behind, just by the cab containing Gogol; and in faint hope of a clue or for some impulse unexplainable, he stopped his cab so as to pick it up. It was addressed to himself, and was quite a bulky parcel. On examination, however, its bulk was found to consist of thirty-three pieces of paper of no value wrapped one round the other. When the last covering was torn away it reduced itself to a small slip of paper, on which was written:—

"The word, I fancy, should be 'pink.'"

The man once known as Gogol said nothing, but the movements of his hands and feet were like those of a man urging a horse to renewed efforts.

Through street after street, through district after district, went the prodigy of the flying elephant, calling crowds to every window, and driving the traffic left and right. And still through all this insane publicity the three cabs toiled after it, until they came to be regarded as part of a procession, and perhaps the advertisement of a circus. They went at such a rate that distances were shortened beyond belief, and Syme saw the Albert Hall in Kensington when he thought that he was still in Paddington. The animal's pace was even more fast and free through the empty, aristocratic streets of South Kensington, and he finally headed towards that part of the sky-line where the enormous Wheel of Earl's Court stood up in the sky. The wheel grew larger and larger, till it filled heaven like the wheel of stars.

THE beast outstripped the cabs. They lost him round several corners, and when they came to one of the gates of the Earl's Court Exhibition they found themselves finally blocked. In front of them was an enormous crowd; in the midst of it was an enormous elephant, heaving and shuddering as such shapeless creatures do. But the President had disappeared.

"Where has he gone to?" asked Syme.

"Gentleman rushed into the Exhibition, sir!" said an official in a dazed manner. Then he added in an injured voice: "Funny gentleman, sir. Asked me to hold his horse, and gave me this."

He held out with distaste a piece of folded paper, addressed: "To the Secretary of the Central Anarchist Council."

The Secretary, raging, rent it open, and found written inside it:—

"When the herring runs a mile,
Let the Secretary smile;
When the herring tries to *fly*,
Let the Secretary die.
Rustic Proverb."

"Why the eternal crikey," began the Secretary, "did you let the man in? Do people commonly come to your Exhibition riding on mad elephants? Do—"

"Look!" shouted Syme suddenly. "Look over there!"

"Look at what?" asked the Secretary savagely.

"Look at the captive balloon!" said Syme, and pointed in a frenzy.

"Why the blazes should I look at a captive balloon?" demanded the Secretary. "What is there queer about a captive balloon?"

"Nothing," said Syme, "except that it isn't captive!"

They all turned their eyes to where the balloon swung and swelled above the Exhibition on a string, like a child's balloon.

A second afterwards the string came in two just under the car, and the balloon, broken loose, floated away with the freedom of a soap bubble.

"Ten thousand devils!" shrieked the Secretary. "He's got into it!" and he shook his fists at the sky.

The balloon, borne by some chance wind, came right above them, and they could see the great white head of the President peering over the side and looking benevolently down on them.

"God bless my soul!" said the Professor with the elderly manner that he could never disconnect from his bleached beard and parchment face. "God bless my soul! I seemed to fancy that something fell on the top of my hat!"

He put up a trembling hand and took from that shelf a piece of twisted paper, which he opened absently, only to find it inscribed with a true lover's knot and the words:—

"Your beauty has not left me indifferent.—From LITTLE SNOWDROP."

There was a short silence, and then Syme said, biting his beard—

"I'm not beaten yet. The blasted thing

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must come down somewhere. Let's follow it!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE SIX PHILOSOPHERS

ACROSS green fields, and breaking through blooming hedges, toiled six draggled detectives, about five miles out of London. The optimist of the party had at first proposed that they should follow the balloon across South England in hansom-cabs. But he was ultimately convinced of the persistent refusal of the balloon to follow the roads, and the still more persistent refusal of the cabmen to follow the balloon. Consequently the tireless though exasperated travellers broke through black thickets and ploughed through ploughed fields till each was turned into a figure too outrageous to be mistaken for a tramp. Those green hills of Surrey saw the final collapse and tragedy of the admirable light grey suit in which Syme had set out from Saffron Park. His silk hat was broken over his nose by a swinging bough, his coat-tails were torn to the shoulder by arresting thorns, the clay of England was splashed up to his collar; but he still carried his yellow beard forward with a silent and furious determination, and his eyes were still fixed on that floating ball of gas, which in the full flush of sunset seemed coloured like a sunset cloud.

"After all," he said, "it is very beautiful!"

"It is singularly and strangely beautiful!" said the Professor. "I wish the beastly gas-bag would burst!"

"No," said Dr. Bull, "I hope it won't. It might hurt the old boy."

"Hurt him!" said the vindictive Professor, "hurt him! Not as much as I'd hurt him if I could get up with him. Little Snowdrop!"

"I don't want him hurt, somehow," said Dr. Bull.

"What!" cried the Secretary bitterly. "Do you believe all that tale about his being our man in the dark room? Sunday would say he was anybody."

"I don't know whether I believe it or not," said Dr. Bull. "But it isn't that that I mean. I can't wish old Sunday's balloon to burst because—"

"Well," said Syme impatiently, "because?"

"Well, because he's so jolly like a balloon himself," said Dr. Bull desperately. "I don't understand a word of all that idea of his being the same man who gave us all our blue cards. It seems to make everything nonsense. But I don't care who knows it, I always had a sympathy for old Sunday himself, wicked as he was. Just as if he was a great bouncing baby. How can I explain what my queer sympathy was? It didn't prevent my fighting him like hell! Shall I make it clear if I say that I liked him because he was so fat?"

"You will not," said the Secretary.

"I've got it now," cried Bull, "it was because he was so fat and so light. Just like a balloon. We always think of fat people as heavy, but he could have danced against a sylph. I see now what I mean. Moderate strength is shown in violence, supreme strength is shown in levity. It was like the old speculations—what would happen if an elephant could leap up in the sky like a grasshopper?"

"Our elephant," said Syme, looking upwards, "has leapt into the sky like a grasshopper."

"And somehow," concluded Bull, "that's why I can't help liking old Sunday. No, it's not an admiration of force, or any silly thing like that. There is a kind of gaiety in the thing, as if he were bursting with some good news. Haven't you sometimes felt it on a spring day? You know Nature plays tricks, but somehow that day proves they are good-natured tricks. I never read the Bible myself, but that part they laugh at is literal truth, 'Why leap ye, ye high hills?' The hills do leap—at least, they try to. . . . Why do I like Sunday? . . . how can I tell you? . . . because he's such a Bounder."

THERE was a long silence, and then the Secretary said in a curious, strained voice—

"You do not know Sunday at all. Perhaps it is because you are better than I, and do not know hell. I was a fierce fellow, and a trifle morbid from the first. The man who sits in darkness, and who chose us all, chose me because I had all the crazy look of a conspirator—because my smile went crooked, and my eyes were gloomy, even when I smiled. But there must have been something in me that answered to the nerves in all these anarchic men. For when I first saw Sunday he expressed to me, not your airy vitality, but something both gross and sad in the Nature of Things. I found

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him smoking in a twilight room, a room with brown blind down, infinitely more depressing than the genial darkness in which our master lives. He sat there on a bench, a huge heap of a man, dark and out of shape. He listened to all my words without speaking or even stirring. I poured out my most passionate appeals, and asked my most eloquent questions. Then, after a long silence, the Thing began to shake, and I thought it was shaken by some secret malady. It shook like a loathsome and living jelly. It reminded me of everything I had ever read about the base bodies that are the origin of life—the deep sea lumps and protoplasm. It seemed like the final form of matter, the most shapeless and the most shameful. I could only tell myself, from its shudderings, that it was something at least that such a monster could be miserable. And then it broke upon me that the bestial mountain was shaking with a lonely laughter, and the laughter was at me. Do you ask me to forgive him that? It is no small thing to be laughed at by something at once lower and stronger than oneself."

"Surely you fellows are exaggerating wildly," cut in the clear voice of Inspector Ratcliffe. "President Sunday is a terrible fellow for one's intellect, but he is not such a Barnum's freak physically as you make out. He received me in an ordinary office, in a grey check coat, in broad daylight. He talked to me in an ordinary way. But I'll tell you what is a trifle creepy about Sunday. His room is neat, his clothes are neat, everything seems in order; but he's absent-minded. Sometimes his great bright eyes go quite blind. For hours he forgets that you are there. Now absent-mindedness is just a bit too awful in a bad man. We think of a wicked man as vigilant. We can't think of a wicked man who is honestly and sincerely dreamy, because we daren't think of a wicked man alone with himself. An absent-minded man means a good-natured man. It means a man who, if he happens to see you, will apologise. But how will you bear an absent-minded man who, if he happens to see you, will kill you? That is what tries the nerves, abstraction combined with cruelty. Men have felt it sometimes when they went through wild forest, and felt that the animals there were at once innocent and pitiless.

They might ignore or slay. How would you like to pass ten mortal hours in a parlour with an absent-minded tiger?"

"And what do you think of Sunday, Gogol?" asked Syme.

"I don't think of Sunday on principle," said Gogol simply, "any more than I stare at the sun at noonday."

"Well, that is a point of view," said Syme thoughtfully. "What do you say, Professor?"

The Professor was walking with bent head and trailing stick, and he did not answer at all.

"Wake up, Professor!" said Syme genially. "Tell us what you think of Sunday."

The Professor spoke at last very slowly, groping for the words.

"I think something," he said, "that I cannot say clearly. Or, rather, I think something that I cannot even think clearly. But it is something like this. My early life, as you know, was a bit too large and loose. Well, when I saw Sunday's face I thought it was too large—everybody does, but I also thought it was too loose. The face was so big, that one couldn't focus it or make it a face at all. The eye was so far away from the nose, that it wasn't an eye. The mouth was so much by itself, that one had to think of it by itself. The whole thing is too hard to explain."

He paused for a little, still trailing his stick, and then went on—

"But put it this way. Walking up a road at night, I have seen a lamp and a lighted window and a cloud make together a most complete and unmistakable face. If any one in heaven has that face I shall know him again. Yet when I walked a little farther I found that there was no face, that the window was ten yards away, the lamp ten hundred yards, the cloud beyond the world. Well, Sunday's face escaped me; it ran away to right and left, as such chance pictures run away. And so his face has made me, somehow, doubt whether there are any faces. I don't know whether your face, Bull, is a face or a combination in perspective. Perhaps one black disc of your beastly glasses is quite close and another fifty miles away. Oh, the doubts of a materialist are not worth a dump. Sunday has taught me the last and the worst doubts, the doubts of a spiritualist. I am a Buddhist, I suppose; and Buddhism is not a creed, it is a doubt. My poor dear Bull, I do not believe that you really have a face. I have not faith enough to believe in matter."

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SYME'S eyes were still fixed upon the errant orb, which, reddened in the evening light, looked like some rosier and more innocent world.

"Have you noticed an odd thing," he said, "about all your descriptions? Each man of you finds Sunday quite different, yet each man of you can only find one thing to compare him to—the universe itself. Bull finds him like the earth in spring, Gogol like the sun at noonday. The Secretary is reminded of the shapeless protoplasm, and the Inspector of the carelessness of virgin forests. The Professor says he is like a changing landscape. This is queer, but it is queerer still that I also have had my odd notion about the President, and I also find that I think of Sunday as I think of the whole world."

"Get on a little faster, Syme," said Bull; "never mind the balloon."

"When I first saw Sunday," said Syme slowly, "I only saw his back; and when I saw his back, I knew he was the worst man in the world. His neck and shoulders were brutal, like those of some apish god. His head had a stoop that was hardly human, like the stoop of an ox. In fact, I had at once the revolting fancy that this was not a man at all, but a beast dressed up in men's clothes."

"Get on," said Dr. Bull.

"And then the queer thing happened. I had seen his back from the street, as he sat in the balcony. Then I entered the hotel, and coming round the other side of him, saw his face in the sunlight. His face frightened me, as it did every one; but not because it was brutal, not because it was evil. On the contrary, it frightened me because it was so beautiful, because it was so good."

"Syme," exclaimed the Secretary, "are you ill?"

"It was like the face of some ancient archangel, judging justly after heroic wars. There was laughter in the eyes, and in the mouth honour and sorrow. There was the same white hair, the same great, grey-clad shoulders that I had seen from behind. But when I saw him from behind I was certain he was an animal, and when I saw him in front I knew he was a god."

"Pan," said the Professor dreamily, "was a god and an animal."

"Then, and again and always," went on Syme, like a man talking to himself, "that has been for me the mystery of Sunday, and it is also the mystery of the world. When I see the horrible back, I am sure the noble face is but a mask. When I see the face but for an instant, I know the back is only a jest. Bad is so bad, that we cannot but think good an accident; good is so good, that we feel certain that evil could be explained. But the whole came to a kind of crest yesterday when I raced Sunday for the cab, and was just behind him all the way."

"Had you time for thinking then?" asked Ratcliffe.

"Time," replied Syme, "for one outrageous thought. I was suddenly possessed with the idea that the blind, blank back of his head really was his face—an awful, eyeless face staring at me! And I fancied that the figure running in front of me was really a figure running backwards, and dancing as he ran."

"Horrible!" said Dr. Bull.

"Horrible is not the ward," said Syme. "It was exactly the worst instant of my life. And yet ten minutes afterwards, when he put his head out of the cab and made a grimace like a gargoyle, I knew that he was only like a father playing hide-and-seek with his children."

"It is a long game," said the Secretary, and frowned at his broken boots.

"Listen to me," cried Syme with extraordinary emphasis. "Shall I tell you the secret of the whole world? It is that we have only known the back of the world. We see everything from behind, and it looks brutal. That is not a tree, but the back of a tree. That is not a cloud, but the back of a cloud. Cannot you see that everything is stooping and hiding a face? If we could only get round in front—"

"Look!" cried out Bull clamorously, "the balloon is coming down!"

There was no need to cry out to Syme, who had never taken his eyes off it. He saw the great luminous globe suddenly stagger in the sky, right itself, and then sink slowly behind the trees like a setting sun.

THE man called Gogol, who had hardly spoken through all their weary travels, suddenly threw up his hands like a lost spirit.

"He is dead!" he cried. "And now I know he was my friend—my friend in the dark!"

"Dead!" snorted the Secretary. "You will not find him dead easily. If he has been tipped out of the car, we shall find him rolling as a colt rolls in a field, kicking his legs for fun."

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"Clashing his hoofs," said the Professor. "The colts do, and so did Pan."

"Pan again!" said Dr. Bull irritably. "You seem to think Pan is everything."

"So he is," said the Professor, "in Greek. He means everything."

"Don't forget," said the Secretary, looking down, "that he also means Panic."

Syme had stood without hearing any of the exclamations.

"It fell over there," he said shortly. "Let us follow it!"

Then he added with an indescribable gesture—

"Oh, if he has cheated us all by getting killed! It would be like one of his larks."

He strode off towards the distant trees with a new energy, his rags and ribbons fluttering in the wind. The others followed him in a more footsore and dubious manner.

And almost at the same moment all six men realised that they were not alone in the little field.

Across the square of turf a tall man was advancing towards them, leaning on a strange long staff like a sceptre. He was clad in fine but old-fashioned suit with knee-breeches; its colour was that shade between blue, violet and grey which can be seen in certain shadows of the woodland. His hair was whitish grey, and at the first glance, taken along with his knee-breeches, looked as if it was powdered. His advance was very quiet; but for the silver frost upon his head, he might have been one of the shadows of the wood.

"Gentlemen," he said, "my master has a carriage waiting for you in the road just by."

"Who is your master?" asked Syme, standing quite still.

"I was told you knew his name," said the man respectfully.

There was a silence, and then the Secretary said—

"Where is this carriage?"

"It has been waiting only a few moments," said the stranger. "My master has only just come home."

Syme looked left and right upon the patch of green field in which he found himself. The hedges were ordinary hedges, the trees seemed ordinary trees; yet he felt like a man entrapped in fairy-land.

He looked the mysterious ambassador up and down, but he could discover nothing except that the man's coat was the exact colour of the purple shadows, and that the man's face was the exact colour of the red and brown and golden sky.

"Show us the place," Syme said briefly, and without a word the man in the violet coat turned his back and walked towards a gap in the hedge, which let in suddenly the light of a white road.

As the six wanderers broke out upon this thoroughfare, they saw the white road blocked by what looked like a long row of carriages, such a row of carriages as might close the approach to some house in Park Lane. Along the side of these carriages stood a rank of splendid servants, all dressed in the grey-blue uniform, and all having a certain quality of stateliness and freedom which would not commonly belong to the servants of a gentleman, but rather to the officials and ambassadors of a great king. There were no less than six carriages waiting, one for each of the tattered and miserable band. All the attendants (as if in court-dress) wore swords, and as each man crawled into his carriage they drew them, and saluted with a sudden blaze of steel.

"What can it all mean?" asked Bull of Syme as they separated. "Is this another joke of Sunday's?"

"I don't know," said Syme as he sank wearily back in the cushions of his carriage; "but if it is, it's one of the jokes you talk about. It's a good-natured one."

THE six adventurers had passed through many adventures, but not one had carried them so utterly off their feet as this last adventure of comfort. They had all become inured to things going roughly; but things suddenly going smoothly swamped them. They could not even feebly imagine what the carriages were; it was enough for them to know that they were carriages, and carriages with cushions. They could not conceive who the old man was who had led them; but it was quite enough that he had certainly led them to the carriages.

Syme drove through a drifting darkness of trees in utter abandonment. It was typical of him that while he had carried his bearded chin forward fiercely so long as anything could be done, when the whole business was taken out of his hands he fell back on the cushions in a frank collapse.

Very gradually and very vaguely he realised into what rich roads the carriage was carrying him. He saw that they passed the stone gates of what might

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have been a park, that they began gradually to climb a hill which, while wooded on both sides, was somewhat more orderly than a forest. Then there began to grow upon him, as upon a man slowly waking from a healthy sleep, a pleasure in everything. He felt that the hedges were what hedges should be, living walls; that a hedge is like a human army, disciplined, but all the more alive. He saw high elms behind the hedges, and vaguely thought how happy boys would be climbing there. Then his carriage took a turn of the path, and he saw suddenly and quietly, like a long, low, sunset cloud, a long, low house, mellow in the mild light of sunset. All the six friends compared notes afterwards and quarrelled; but they all agreed that in some unaccountable way the place reminded them of their boyhood. It was either this elm-top or that crooked path, it was either this scrap of orchard or that shape of a window; but each man of them declared that he could remember this place before he could remember his mother.

When the carriages eventually rolled up to a large, low, cavernous gateway, another man in the same uniform, but wearing a silver star on the grey breast of his coat, came out to meet them. This impressive person said to the bewildered Syme—

"Refreshments are provided for you in your room."

Syme, under the influence of the same mesmeric sleep of amazement, went up the large oaken stairs after the respectful attendant. He entered a splendid suite of apartments that seemed to be designed specially for him. He walked up to a long mirror with the ordinary instinct of his class, to pull his tie straight or to smooth his hair; and there he saw the frightful figure that he was—blood running down his face from where the bough had struck him, his hair standing out like yellow rags of rank grass, his clothes torn into long, wavering tatters. At once the whole enigma sprang up, simply as the question of how he had got there, and how he was to get out again. Exactly at the same moment a man in blue, who had been appointed as his valet, said very solemnly—

"I have put out your clothes, sir."

"Clothes!" said Syme sardonically. "I have no clothes except these," and he lifted two long strips of his frock-coat in fascinating festoons, and made a movement as if to twirl like a ballet girl.

"My master asks me to say," said the attendant, "that there is a fancy dress ball to-night, and that he desires you to put on the costume that I have laid out. Meanwhile, sir, there is a bottle of Burgundy and some cold pheasant, which he hopes you will not refuse, as it is some hours before supper."

"Cold pheasant is a good thing," said Syme reflectively, "and Burgundy is a spanking good thing. But really I do not want either of them so much as I want to know what the devil all this means, and what sort of costume you have got laid out for me. Where is it?"

The servant lifted off a kind of ottoman a long peacock-blue drapery, rather of the nature of a domino, on the front of which was emblazoned a large golden sun, and which was splashed here and there with flaming stars and crescents.

"You're to be dressed as Thursday, sir," said the valet somewhat affably.

"Dressed as Thursday!" said Syme in meditation. "It doesn't sound a warm costume."

"Oh, yes, sir," said the other eagerly, "the Thursday costume is quite warm, sir. It fastens up to the chin."

"Well, I don't understand anything," said Syme, sighing. "I have been used so long to uncomfortable adventures that comfortable adventures knock me out. Still, I may be allowed to ask why I should be particularly like Thursday in a green frock spotted all over with the sun and moon. These orbs, I think, shine on other days. I once saw the moon on Tuesday, I remember."

"Beg pardon, sir," said the valet, "Bible also provided for you," and with a respectful and rigid finger he pointed out a passage in the first chapter of Genesis. Syme read it wondering. It was that in which the fourth day of the week is associated with the creation of the sun and moon. Here, however, they reckoned from a Christian Sunday.

"This is getting wilder and wilder," said Syme, as he sat down in a chair. "Who are these people who provide cold pheasant and Burgundy, and green clothes and Bibles? Do they provide everything?"

"Yes, sir, everything," said the attendant gravely. "Shall I help you on with your costume?"

"Oh, hitch the bally thing on!" said Syme impatiently.

But though he affected to despise the mummery, he felt a curious freedom and naturalness in his movements as the blue

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and gold garment fell about him; and when he found that he had to wear a sword, it stirred a boyish dream. As he passed out of the room, he flung the folds across his shoulder with a gesture, his sword stood out at an angle, and he had all the swagger of a troubadour. For these disguises did not disguise, but reveal.

CHAPTER XV

THE ACCUSER

AS Syme strode along the corridor he saw the Secretary standing at the top of a great flight of stairs. The man had never looked so noble. He was draped in a long robe of starless black, down the centre of which fell a band or broad stripe of pure white, like a single shaft of light. The whole looked like some very severe ecclesiastical vestment. There was no need for Syme to search his memory or the Bible in order to remember that the first day of creation marked the mere creation of light out of darkness. The vestment itself would alone have suggested the symbol; and Syme felt also how perfectly this pattern of pure white and black expressed the soul of the pale and austere Secretary, with his inhuman veracity and his cold frenzy, which made him so easily make war on the anarchists, and yet so easily pass for one of them. Syme was scarcely surprised to notice that, amid all the ease and hospitality of their new surroundings, this man's eyes were still stern. No smell of ale or orchards could make the Secretary cease to ask a reasonable question.

If Syme had been able to see himself, he would have realised that he, too, seemed to be for the first time himself and no one else. For if the Secretary stood for that philosopher who loves the original and formless light, Syme was a type of the poet who seeks always to make the light in special shapes, to split it up into sun and star. The philosopher may sometimes love the infinite; the poet always loves the finite.

For him the great moment is not the creation of light, but the creation of the sun and moon.

As they descended the broad stairs together they overtook Ratcliffe, who was clad in spring green like a huntsman, and the pattern upon whose garment was a green tangle of trees. For he stood for that third day on which the earth and green things were made, and his square, sensible face, with its not unfriendly cynicism, seemed appropriate enough to it.

They were led out of another broad and low gateway into a very large old English garden, full of torches and bonfires, by the broken light of which a vast carnival of people were dancing in motley dress. Syme seemed to see every shape in Nature imitated in some crazy costume. There was a man dressed as a windmill with enormous sails, a man dressed as an elephant, a man dressed as a balloon; the two last, together, seemed to keep the thread of their farcical adventures. Syme even saw, with a queer thrill, one dancer dressed like an enormous hornbill, with a beak twice as big as himself—the queer bird which had fixed itself on his fancy like a living question while he was rushing down the long road at the Zoological Gardens. There were a thousand other such objects, however. There was a dancing lamp-post, a dancing apple tree, a dancing ship. One would have thought that the untamable tune of some mad musician had set all the common objects of field and street dancing an eternal jig. And long afterwards, when Syme was middle-aged and at rest, he could never see one of those particular objects—a lamp-post, or an apple tree, or a wind-mill—without thinking that it was a strayed reveller from that revel of masquerade.

On one side of this lawn, alive with dancers, was a sort of green bank, like the terrace in such old-fashioned gardens.

Along this, in a kind of crescent, stood seven great chairs, the thrones of the seven days. Gogol and Dr. Bull were already in their seats; the Professor was just mounting to his. Gogol, or Tuesday, had his simplicity well symbolised by a dress designed upon the division of the waters, a dress that separated upon his forehead and fell to his feet, grey and silver, like a sheet of rain. The Professor, whose day was that on which the birds and fishes—the ruder forms of life—were created, had a dress of dim purple, over which sprawled goggle-eyed fishes and outrageous tropical birds, the union in him of unfathomable fancy and of doubt. Dr. Bull, the last day of Creation, wore a coat covered with heraldic animals in red and gold, and on his crest a man rampant. He lay back in his chair

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with a broad smile, the picture of an optimist in his element.

ONE by one the wanderers ascended the bank and sat in their strange seats. As each of them sat down a roar of enthusiasm rose from the carnival, such as that with which crowds receive kings. Cups were clashed and torches shaken, and feathered hats flung in the air. The men for whom these thrones were reserved were men crowned with some extraordinary laurels. But the central chair was empty.

Syme was on the left hand of it and the Secretary on the right. The Secretary looked across the empty throne at Syme, and said, compressing his lips—

"We do not know yet that he is not dead in a field."

Almost as Syme heard the words, he saw on the sea of human faces in front of him a frightful and beautiful alteration, as if heaven had opened behind his head. But Sunday had only passed silently along the front like a shadow, and had sat in the central seat. He was draped plainly, in a pure and terrible white, and his hair was like a silver flame.

For a long time—it seemed for hours—that huge masquerade of mankind swayed and stamped in front of them to marching and exultant music. Every couple dancing seemed a separate romance; it might be a fairy dancing with a pillar-box, or a peasant girl dancing with the moon; but in each case it was, somehow, as absurd as Alice in Wonderland, yet as grave and kind as a love story. At last, however, the thick crowd began to thin itself. Couples strolled away into the garden-walks, or began to drift towards that end of the building where stood smoking, in huge pots like fish-kettles, some hot and scented mixtures of old ale or wine. Above all these, upon a sort of black framework on the roof of the house, roared in its iron basket a gigantic bonfire, which lit up the land for miles. It flung the homely effect of firelight over the face of vast forests of grey or brown, and it seemed to fill with warmth even the emptiness of upper night. Yet this also, after a time, was allowed to grow fainter; the dim groups gathered more and more round the great cauldrons, or passed, laughing and clattering, into the inner passages of that ancient house. Soon there were only some ten loiterers in the garden; soon only four. Finally the last stray merry-maker ran into the house whooping to his companions. The fire faded, and the slow, strong stars came out. And the seven strange men were left alone, like seven stone statues on their chairs of stone. Not one of them had spoken a word.

They seemed in no haste to do so, but heard in silence the hum of insects and the distant song of one bird. Then Sunday spoke, but so dreamily that he might have been continuing a conversation rather than beginning one.

"We will eat and drink later," he said. "Let us remain together a little, we who have loved each other so sadly, and have fought so long. I seem to remember only centuries of heroic war, in which you were always heroes—epic on epic, iliad on iliad, and you always brothers in arms. Whether it was but recently (for time is nothing), or at the beginning of the world, I sent you out to war. I sat in the darkness, where there is not any created thing, and to you I was only a voice commanding valour and an unnatural virtue. You heard the voice in the dark, and you never heard it again. The sun in heaven denied it, the earth and sky denied it, all human wisdom denied it. And when I met you in the daylight I denied it myself."

Syme stirred sharply in his seat, but otherwise there was silence, and the incomprehensible went on.

"But you were men. You did not forget your secret honour, though the whole cosmos turned an engine of torture to tear it out of you. I knew how near you were to hell. I know how you, Thursday, crossed swords with King Satan, and how you, Wednesday, named me in the hour without hope."

There was complete silence in the starlit garden, and then the black-browed Secretary, implacable, turned in his chair towards Sunday, and said in a harsh voice—

"Who and what are you?"

"I am the Sabbath," said the other without moving. "I am the peace of God."

The Secretary started up, and stood crushing his costly robe in his hand.

"I know what you mean," he cried, "and it is exactly that that I cannot forgive you. I know you are contentment, optimism, what do they call the thing, an ultimate reconciliation. Well, I am not reconciled. If you were the man in the dark room, why were you also Sun-

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day, an offence to the sunlight? If you were from the first our father and our friend, why were you also our greatest enemy? We wept, we fled in terror; the iron entered into our souls—and you are the peace of God! Oh, I can forgive God His anger, though it destroyed nations; but I cannot forgive Him His peace."

Sunday answered not a word, but very slowly he turned his face of stone upon Syme as if asking a question.

"No," said Syme, "I do not feel fierce like that. I am grateful to you, not only for wine and hospitality here, but for a fine scamper and free fight. But I should like to know. My soul and heart are as happy and quiet here as this old garden, but my reason is still crying out. I should like to know."

SUNDAY looked at Ratcliffe, whose clear voice said—

"It seems so *silly* that you should have been on both sides and fought yourself."

Bull said—

"I understand nothing, but I am happy. In fact, I am going to sleep."

"I am not happy," said the Professor with his head in his hands, "because I do not understand You let me stray a little too near to hell."

And then Gogol said, with the absolute simplicity of a child—

"I wish I knew why I was hurt so much."

Still Sunday said nothing, but only sat with his mighty chin upon his hand, and gazed at the distance. Then at last he said—

"I have heard your complaints in order. And here, I think, comes another to complain, and we will hear him also."

The falling fire in the great cresset threw a last long gleam, like a bar of burning gold, across the dim grass. Against this fiery band was outlined in utter black the advancing legs of a black-clad figure. He seemed to have a fine close suit with knee-breeches such as that which was worn by the servants of the house, only that it was not blue, but of this absolute sable. He had, like the servants, a kind of sword by his side. It was only when he had come quite close to the crescent of the seven and flung up his face to look at them, that Syme saw, with thunderstruck clearness, that the face was the broad, almost ape-like face of his old friend Gregory, with its rank red hair and its insulting smile.

"Gregory!" gasped Syme, half-rising from his seat. "Why, this is the real anarchist!"

"Yes," said Gregory, with a great and dangerous restraint, "I am the real anarchist."

"And there came a day," murmured Bull, who seemed really to have fallen asleep, " 'when the sons of God came before the Lord, and Satan also came with them.' "

"You are right," said Gregory, and gazed all round. "I am a destroyer. I would destroy the world if I could."

A sense of a pathos far under the earth stirred up in Syme, and he spoke brokenly and without sequence.

"Oh, most unhappy man," he cried, "try to be happy! You have red hair like your sister."

"My red hair, like red flames, shall burn up the world," said Gregory "I thought I hated everything more than common men can hate anything; but I find that I do not hate everything so much as I hate you!"

"I never hated you," said Syme very sadly.

Then out of this unintelligible creature the last thunders broke.

"You!" he cried. "You never hated because you never lived. I know what you are all of you, from first to last—you are the people in power! You are the police—the great fat, smiling men in blue and buttons! You are the Law, and you have never been broken. But is there a free soul alive that does not long to break you, only because you have never been broken? We in revolt talk all kind of nonsense doubtless about this crime or that crime of the Government. It is all folly! The only crime of the Government is that it governs. The unpardonable sin of the supreme power is that it is supreme. I do not curse you for being cruel. I do not curse you (though I might) for being kind. I curse you for being safe! You sit in your chairs of stone, and have never come down from them. You are the seven angels of heaven, and you have had no troubles. Oh, I could forgive you everything, you that rule all mankind, if I could feel for once that you had suffered for one hour a real agony such as I—"

Syme sprang to his feet, shaking from head to foot.

"I see everything," he cried, "everything that there is. Why does each thing on the earth war against each other thing? Why does each small thing in

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the world have to fight against the world itself? Why does a fly have to fight the whole universe? Why does a dandelion have to fight the whole universe? For the same reason that I had to be alone in the dreadful Council of the Days. So that each thing that obeys law may have the glory and isolation of the anarchist. So that each man fighting for order may be as brave and good a man as the dynamiter. So that the real lie of Satan may be flung back in the face of this blasphemer, so that by tears and torture we may earn the right to say to this man, 'You lie!' No agonies can be too great to buy the right to say to this accuser, 'We also have suffered.'

"It is not true that we have never been broken. We have been broken upon the wheel. It is not true that we have never descended from these thrones. We have descended into hell. We were complaining of unforgettable miseries even at the very moment when this man entered insolently to accuse us of happiness. I repel the slander; we have not been happy. I can answer for every one of the great guards of Law whom he has accused. At least—"

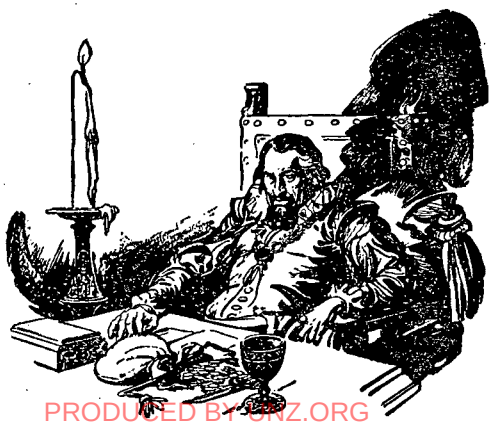
He had turned his eyes so as to see suddenly the great face of Sunday, which wore a strange smile.

"Have you," he cried in a dreadful voice, "have you ever suffered?"

As he gazed, the great face grew to an awful size, grew larger than the colossal mask of Memnon, which had made him scream as a child. It grew larger and larger, filling the whole sky; then everything went black. Only in the blackness before it entirely destroyed his brain he seemed to hear a distant voice saying a commonplace text that he had heard somewhere, "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?"

WHEN men in books awake from a vision, they commonly find themselves in some place in which they might have fallen asleep; they yawn in a chair or lift themselves with bruised limbs from a field. Syme's experience was something much more psychologically strange. For while he could always remember afterwards that he had swooned before the face of Sunday, he could not remember having ever come to at all. He could only remember that gradually and naturally he knew that he was and had been walking along a country lane with an easy and conversational companion. That companion had been a part of his recent drama; it was the red-haired poet Gregory. They were walking like old friends, and were in the middle of a conversation about some triviality. But Syme could only feel an unnatural buoyancy in his body and a crystal simplicity in his mind that seemed to be superior to everything that he said or did. He felt he was in possession of some impossible good news.

Dawn was breaking over everything in colours at once clear and timid; as if Nature made a first attempt at yellow and a first attempt at rose. A breeze blew so clean and sweet, that one could not think that it blew from the sky; it blew rather through some hole in the sky. Syme felt a simple surprise when he saw rising all around him on both sides of the road the red, irregular buildings of Saffron Park. He had no idea that he had walked so near London. He walked by instinct along one white road, on which early birds hopped and sang, and found himself outside a fenced garden. There he saw the sister of Gregory, the girl with the gold-red hair, cutting lilac before breakfast, with the great unconscious gravity of a girl.



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A. MERRITT

MANY letters came to the editors of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* upon the announcement on August 21, 1943 of the untimely passing of Abe Merritt, well known editor of the American Weekly and perhaps the most popular writer of our times in the field of fantasy fiction.

The readers and the editors feel deeply bereaved at the loss of this noble character and staunch personal friend. Indeed, anyone who traveled through the magic pages of "The Moon Pool" or any of his many other classics, holding genial Abe Merritt's hand—he wrote so realistically—felt that he knew him intimately.

Quite a number of his readers knew Mr. Merritt personally; some made long pilgrimages to see him. He was never without time, never too busy, to see his fan-visitors and just a week before his death—he seemed very well then—he told one admirer about all kinds of plans to complete several unfinished fantasies.

Abe Merritt was a great writer, a companionable, pleasant soul who had many interests in life. Among his hobbies was a keen enthusiasm for the lapidarian arts; he collected exotic souvenirs from far away lands and his studio was equipped with microscopic and polishing paraphernalia for what he said was "the most relaxing and satisfying hobby in the world": the study of precious and semi-precious stones.

As our readers well know, A. Merritt's great stories were the very foundation of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries,* and rightly so; his stories were the product of a highly imaginative mind. Many times he told us that he projected himself right into every scene of his fantasies while writing them, and that "The Snake Mother", Larry O'Keefe, Khalk'ru, and his other fine characterizations and vividly conceived creatures of the imagination, were as real to him as if he met them in the flesh. That they were real to us too, is attested in the continuous demand for Mr. Merritt's stories and the hundreds of letters received, some of which found their way into our Reader's Viewpoint department.

BORN in Beverly, N. J., Abe Merritt was of Quaker stock. He joined the staff of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* shortly after graduating from high school, and found his place very rapidly on the *American Weekly* where he was trained as Sunday editor by that other outstanding editorial genius, Morrill Goddard, whose place he was eventually to fill.

The greater part of Abe Merritt's celebrated fiction stories appeared for the first time in the old *All-Story,* then a magazine of general fiction, and in *The Argosy,* in which latter magazine "Creep, Shadow!" was published in 1934, the last of the great Merritt tales to appear in that vehicle.

"The Moon Pool" is considered by most fantasy authorities to be his greatest story, but there are some who place "The Ship of Ishtar" and "The Dwellers in the Mirage" in as high a place among Merritt's wonderful stories.

To you, Abe Merritt, our sincere appreciation. The friends who shall miss you are legion.

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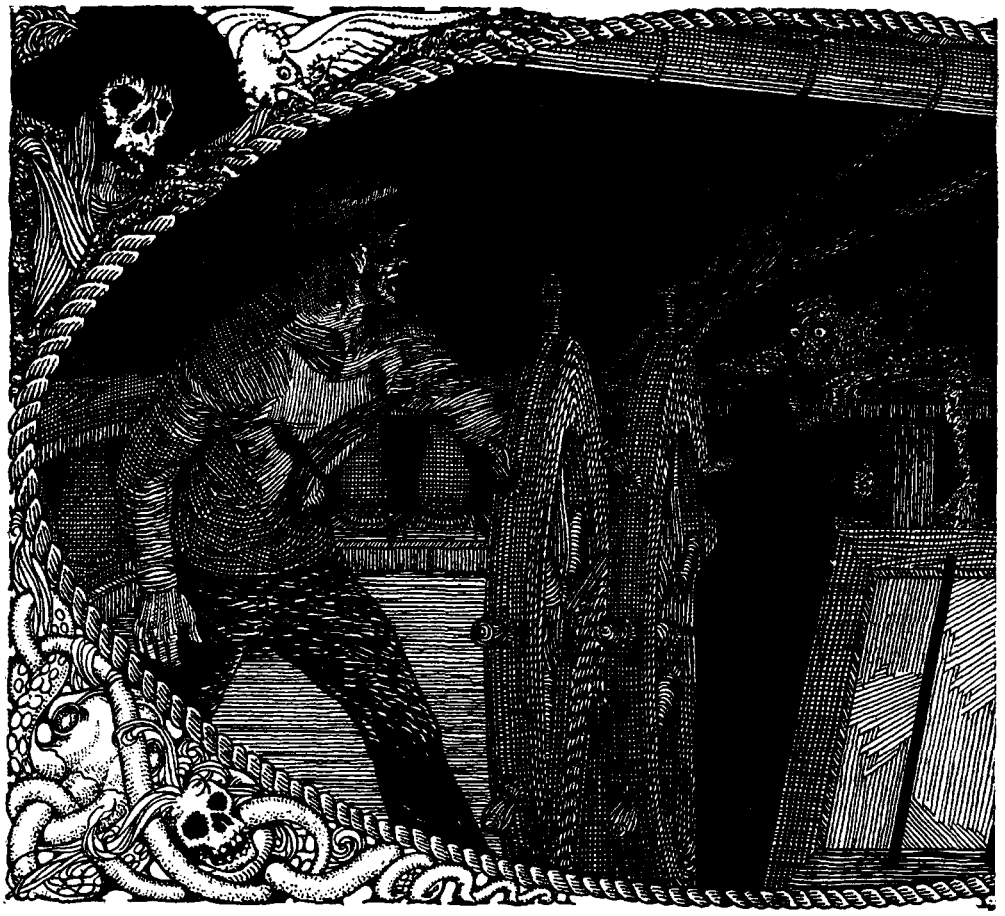

"Strange as the glimmer of the ghastly light
That shines from some vast crest of wave at night."

CHAPTER I

THE FIGURE OUT OF THE SEA

HE BEGAN without any circumlocution.

"I joined the *Mortzestus* in 'Frisco. I heard before I signed on, that there were some funny yarns floating round about her; but I was pretty nearly on the beach, and too jolly anxious to get away, to worry about trifles. Besides, by all accounts, she was right enough as far as grub and treatment went.

"When I asked fellows to give it a name, they generally could not. All they could tell me was that she was unlucky, and made thundering long passages, and had more than a fair share of dirty weather.

"Also, that she had twice had the sticks blown out of her, and her cargo shifted. Besides all these, a heap of other things that might happen to any packet, and would not be comfortable to run into. Still, they were the ordinary things, and I was willing enough to risk them, to get home. All the same, if I had been given the chance, I should have shipped in some other vessel as a matter of preference.

"The first night I was in her, I found that it was common talk among the other fellows, that there was something queer about the ship. They spoke of her as if it were an accepted fact that she was

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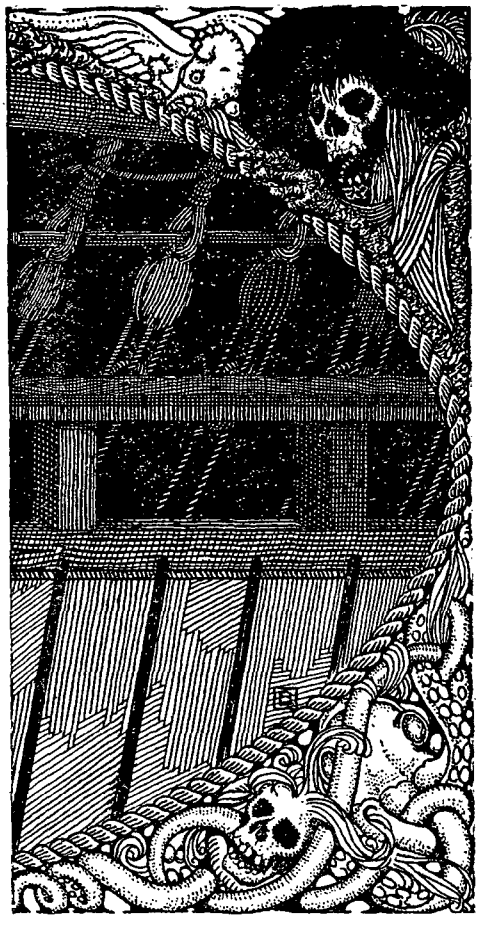
THE GHOST PIRATES

by William Hope Hodgson



"The eyes peering at me over the taffrail reflected the binnacle light with a vile, tigerish gleam"

haunted; yet they all treated the matter as a joke; all, that is, except a young cockney — Williams — who, instead of laughing at their jests on the subject, seemed to take the whole matter seriously.

"This made me rather curious. I began to wonder whether there was, after all, some truth underlying the vague stories I had heard; and I took the first opportunity to ask him whether he had any reasons for believing that there was anything in the yarns about the ship.

"At first he was inclined to be a bit offish; but, presently, he came round, and told me that he did not know of any particular incident which could be called unusual in the sense in which I meant. Yet that, at the same time, there were lots of little things which, if you put them together, made you think a bit. For instance, she always made long passages and had so much dirty weather—nothing but that and calms and head winds. Then, other things happened; sails that he knew, himself, had been properly stowed, were always blowing adrift *at night*. And then he said a thing that surprised me.

" 'There's too many bloomin' shadders about this 'ere packet; they gets onter yer nerves like nothin' as ever I seen before in me nat'ral.'

"He blurted it all out in a heap, and I turned round and looked at him.

" 'Too many shadows!' I said. 'What on earth do you mean?' But he refused to explain himself.

"We left 'Frisco next day, with a fine, fair wind, that seemed a bit like putting the stopper on the yarns I had heard about the ship's ill luck. And yet. . . ."

He hesitated a moment, and then went on again.

First magazine rights purchased from the Estate of William Hope Hodgson.

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"For the first couple of weeks out, nothing unusual happened, and the wind still held fair. I began to feel that I had been rather lucky, after all, in the packet into which I had been shunted. Most of the other fellows gave her a good name, and there was a pretty general opinion growing among the crowd that it was all a silly yarn about her being haunted. And then, just when I was settling down to things, something happened that opened my eyes no end.

"IT WAS in the eight to twelve watch, and I was sitting on the steps, on the starboard side, leading up to the fo'cas'le head. The night was fine and there was a splendid moon. Away aft, I heard the timekeeper strike four bells, and the look-out, an old fellow named Jaskett, answered him. As he let go the bell lanyard, he caught sight of me, where I sat quietly, smoking. He leant over the rail, and looked down at me.

"'That you, Jessop?' he asked.

"'I believe it is,' I replied.

"'We'd 'ave our gran'mothers an' all the rest of our petticoated relash'ns comin' to sea, if 'twere always like this,' he remarked, reflectively—indicating, with a sweep of his pipe and hand, the calmness of the sea and sky.

"I saw no reason for denying that, and he continued:

"'If this ole packet is 'aunted, as some of 'em seems to think, well, all as I can say it, let me 'ave the luck to tumble across another of the same sort. Good grub, an' duff fer Sundays, an' a decent crowd of 'em aft, an' everythin' comfertable. Sometimes—' At that moment, the relief, one of the ordinary seamen, went up the other ladder on to the fo'cas'le head, and the old chap turned to ask him 'Why the 'ell he'd not relieved him a bit smarter.' The ordinary made some reply; but what it was, I did not catch; for abruptly, away aft, my rather sleepy gaze had lighted on something altogether extraordinary and outrageous. It was nothing less than the form of a man stepping inboard over the starboard rail, a little abaft the main rigging. I stood up and caught at the handrail, and stared.

"'What is it, mate?' the look-out asked, curiously, seeing my intent attitude.

"The thing, whatever it was, had disappeared into the shadows on the lee side of the deck.

"'Nothing!' I replied, shortly; for I was too bewildered then, at what my eyes had just shown me, to say any more.

"My common sense told me I must have fancied it all. I walked over to the mainmast, and looked behind the pinrail that partly surrounded it, and down into the shadow of the pumps; but there was nothing. Then I went in under the break of the poop. It was darker under there than out on deck.

"I looked up both sides of the deck, and saw that they were bare of anything such as I looked for. The assurance was comforting. I glanced at the poop ladders, and remembered that nothing could have gone up there without the Second Mate or the Time-keeper seeing it. Then I leaned my back up against the bulkshead, and thought the whole matter over, rapidly, sucking at my pipe, and keeping my glance about the deck. I concluded my think, and said 'No!' out loud.

"THEN something occurred to me, and I said 'Unless—' and went over to the starboard bulwarks, and looked over and down into the sea; but there was nothing but sea; and so I turned and made my way forrard. My common sense had triumphed, and I was convinced that my imagination had been playing tricks with me.

"I reached the door on the port side, leading into the fo'cas'le, and was about to enter, when something made me look behind. As I did so, I had a shaker. Away aft, a dim, shadowy form stood in the wake of a swaying belt of moonlight that swept the deck a bit abaft the mainmast.

"It was the same figure that I had just been attributing to my fancy. I will admit that I felt more than startled; I was quite a bit frightened. I was convinced now that it was no mere imaginary thing. It was a human figure. And yet, with the flicker of the moonlight and the shadows chasing over it, I was unable to say more than that.

"I began to pluck up courage. I accused myself of getting fanciful; otherwise I should have tumbled to it earlier. And then, in spite of all my reasoning, I was still afraid of going aft to discover who that was, standing on the lee side of the maindeck. Yet I felt that if I shirked it, I was only fit to be dumped overboard; and so I went, though not with any great speed, as you can imagine.

"I had gone half the distance, and still the figure remained there, motionless and

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silent—the moonlight and the shadows playing over it with each roll of the ship. I think I tried to be surprised. If it were one of the fellows playing the fool, he must have heard me coming, and why didn't he scoot while he had the chance? And where could he have hidden himself, before? All these things, I asked myself, in a rush, with a queer mixture of doubt and belief; and, you know, in the meantime, I was drawing nearer. I had passed the house, and was not twelve paces distant; when, abruptly, the silent figure made three quick strides to the port rail, and *climbed over it into the sea.*

"I rushed to the side, and stared over; but nothing met my gaze, except the shadow of the ship, sweeping over the moon-lit sea.

"How long I stared down blankly into the water, it would be impossible to say; certainly for a good minute. I felt blank—just horribly blank. It was such a beastly confirmation of the *unnaturalness* of the thing I had concluded to be only a sort of brain fancy. I seemed, for that little time, deprived, you know, of the power of coherent thought. I suppose I was dazed—mentally stunned, in a way.

"As I have said, a minute or so must have gone, while I had been staring into the dark of the water under the ship's side. Then, I came suddenly to my ordinary self. The Second Mate was singing out: 'Lee fore brace.'

"I went to the braces, like a chap in a dream.

CHAPTER II

THE MAN UP THE MAIN

THE next morning, in my watch below, I had a look at the places where that strange thing had come aboard, and left the ship; but I found nothing unusual, and no clue to help me understand the mystery of the strange man.

"For several days after that, all went quietly; though I prowled about the decks at night, trying to discover anything fresh that might tend to throw some light on to the matter. I was careful to say nothing to anyone about the thing I had seen. In any case, I felt sure I should only have been laughed at.

"Several nights passed away in this manner, and I was no nearer to an understanding of the affair. And then something happened.

"It occurred in the first watch, just after six bells. I was forrard, sitting on the fore-hatch. No one was about the maindeck. The night was exceedingly fine; and the wind had dropped away almost to nothing, so that the ship was very quiet.

"Suddenly, I heard the Second Mate's voice—

"'In the main-rigging, there! Who's that going aloft?'

"I sat up on the hatch, and listened. There succeeded an intense silence. Then the Second's voice came again. He was evidently getting wild.

"'Do you damn well hear me? What the hell are you doing up there? Come down!'

"I rose to my feet, and walked up to wind'ard. From there, I could see the break of the poop. The Second Mate was standing by the starboard ladder. He appeared to be looking up at something that was hidden from me by the topsails. As I stared, he broke out again:

"'Hell and damnation, you blasted sojer, come down when I tell you!'

"In the same moment there came the shrill blast of the Second's whistle; he was whistling for the watch, and I turned and ran to the fo'cas'le to rouse them out. Another minute, and I was hurrying aft with them to see what was wanted.

"His voice met us half-way:

"'Up the main, some of you, smartly now, and find out who that damned fool is up there. See what mischief he's up to.'

"'i, i, Sir,' several of the men sung out, and a couple jumped into the weather rigging. I joined them, and the rest were proceeding to follow; but the Second shouted for some to go up to leeward—case the fellow tried to get down that side.

"The first man to wind'ard had reached the futtock shrouds; his head was above the top, and he was taking a preliminary look, before venturing higher.

"'See anythin', Jock?' asked Plummer, the man next above me.

"'Na'!' said Jock, tersely, and climbed over the top, and so disappeared from my sight.

"The fellow ahead of me followed. He reached the futtock rigging, and stopped to expectorate. I was close at his heels, and he looked down to me.

"'What's up, anyway?' he said. 'What's 'e seen? 'oo're we chasin' after?'

"I said I didn't know, and he swung

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up into the topmast rigging. I followed on. The chaps on the lee side were about level with us. Under the foot of the topsail, I could see Tammy and the other 'prentice down on the maindeck, looking upwards.

"THE fellows were a bit excited in a sort of subdued way; though I am inclined to think there was far more curiosity and, perhaps, a certain consciousness of the strangeness of it all. I know that, looking to leeward, there was a tendency to keep well together, in which I sympathised.

"'Must be a bloomin' stowaway,' one of the men suggested.

"I grabbed at the idea instantly. Perhaps. . . . And then, in a moment, I dismissed it. I remembered how that first thing had stepped over the rail *into the sea*. *That* matter could not be explained in such a manner. With regard to this, I was curious and anxious. *I* had seen nothing this time. What could the Second Mate have seen? I wondered. Were we chasing fancies, or was there really some one—something real, among the shadows above us? My thoughts returned to that thing Tammy and I had seen near the log-reel. I remembered how incapable the Second Mate had been of seeing anything then. I remembered how natural it had seemed that he should not be able to see. I caught the word 'stowaway' again. After all, that might explain away *this* affair. It would—

"My train of thought was broken suddenly. One of the men was shouting and gesticulating.

"'I sees 'im! I sees 'im!' He was pointing upwards over our heads.

"'Where?' said the man above me. 'Where?'

"I was looking up, for all that I was worth. I was conscious of a certain sense of relief. 'It is *real*, then,' I said to myself. I screwed my head round, and looked along the yards above us. Yet, still I could see nothing; nothing except shadows and patches of light.

"Down on deck, I caught the Second Mate's voice.

"'Have you got him?' he was shouting.

"'Not yet, Zur,' sung out the lowest man on the lee side.

"'We sees 'im, Sir,' added Quoin.

"'I don't!' I said.

"'There 'e is agen,' he said.

"We had reached the t'gallant rigging, and he was pointing up to the royal yard.

"'Ye're a fule, Quoin. That's what ye are.'

"The voice came from above. It was Jock's, and there was a burst of laughter at Quoin's expense.

"I could see Jock now. He was standing in the rigging, just below the yard. He had gone straight away up, while the rest of us were mooning over the top.

"'Ye're a fule, Quoin,' he said again. 'And I'm thinking the Second's juist as daft.'

"He began to descend.

"'Then there's no one?' I asked.

"'Na',' he said, briefly.

"As we reached the deck, the Second Mate ran down off the poop. He came towards us, with an expectant air.

"'You've got him?' he asked, confidently.

"'There wasn't any one,' I said.

"'What!' he nearly shouted. 'You're hiding something!' he continued angrily, and glancing from one to another. 'Out with it. Who was it?'

"'We're hiding nothing,' I replied, speaking for the lot. 'There's no one up there.'

"The Second looked round upon us.

"'Am I a fool?' he asked contemptuously.

"There was an assenting silence.

"'I saw him myself,' he continued. 'Tammy, here, saw him. He wasn't over the top when I first spotted him. There's no mistake about it. It's all damned rot saying he's not there.'

"'Well, he's not, Sir,' I answered. 'Jock went right up to the royal yard.'

"The Second Mate said nothing in immediate reply; but went aft a few steps and looked up the main. Then he turned to the two 'prentices.

"'Sure you two boys didn't see any one coming down from the main?' he inquired, suspiciously.

"'Yes, Sir,' they answered together.

"'Anyway,' I heard him mutter to himself, 'I'd have spotted him myself, if he had.'

"'Have you any idea, Sir, who it was you saw?' I asked, at this juncture.

"He looked at me, keenly.

"'No!' he said.

"He thought for a few moments, while we all stood about in silence, waiting for him to let us go.

"'By the holy poker!' he exclaimed, suddenly. 'But I ought to have thought of that before.'

"He turned, and eyed us individually.

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"'You're all here?' he asked.

"'Yes, Sir,' we said in a chorus. I could see that he was counting us. Then he spoke again.

"'All of you men stay here where you are. Tammy, you go into *your* place and see if the other fellows are in their bunks. Then come and tell me. Smartly now!'

"The boy went, and he turned to the other 'prentice.

"'You get along forrard to the fo'cas'le,' he said. 'Count the other watch; then come aft and report to me.'

"AS THE youngster disappeared along the deck to the fo'cas'le, Tammy returned from his visit to the Glory Hole, to tell the Second Mate that the other two 'prentices were sound asleep in their bunks. Whereupon, the Second bundled him off to the Carpenter's and Sailmaker's berth, to see whether they were turned-in.

"While he was gone, the other boy came aft, and reported that all the men were in their bunks and asleep.

"'Sure?' the Second asked him.

"'Quite, Sir,' he answered.

"The Second Mate made a quick gesture.

"'Go and see if the Steward is in his berth,' he said, abruptly. It was plain to me that he was tremendously puzzled.

"'You've something to learn yet, Mr. Second Mate,' I thought to myself. Then I fell to wondering to what conclusions he would come.

"A few seconds later, Tammy returned to say that the Carpenter, Sailmaker and 'Doctor' were all turned-in.

"The Second Mate muttered something, and told him to go down into the saloon to see whether the First and Third Mates, by any chance, were not in their berths.

"Tammy started off; then halted.

"'Shall I have a look into the Old Man's place, Sir, while I'm down there?' he inquired.

"'No!' said the Second Mate. 'Do what I told you, and then come and tell me. If any one's to go into the Captain's cabin, it's got to be me.'

"Tammy said 'i, i, Sir,' and skipped away, up on to the poop.

"While he was gone, the other 'prentice came up to say that the Steward was in his berth, and that he wanted to know what the hell he was fooling around his part of the ship for.

"The Second Mate said nothing, for nearly a minute. Then he turned to us, and told us we might all go forrard.

"As we moved off in a body, talking in undertones, Tammy came down from the poop, and went up to the Second Mate. I heard him say that the two Mates were in their berths, asleep. Then he added, as if it were an afterthought—

"'So's the Old man.'

"'I thought I told you—' the Second Mate began.

"'I didn't, Sir,' Tammy said. 'His cabin door was open.'

"The Second Mate started to go aft. I caught a fragment of a remark he was making to Tammy.

"'. . . accounted for the whole crew. I'm . . .'

"He went up on to the poop. I did not catch the rest.

"I had loitered a moment; now, however, I hurried after the others. As we neared the fo'cas'le, one bell went, and we roused out the other watch, and told them what jinks we had been up to.

"'Might 'ave been a stowaway, yer know,' I heard Quoin, the one who had suggested it before, remark to one of the A.B.'s, named Stubbins. . . . A short, rather surly-looking chap.

"'Might have been hell!' returned Stubbins. 'Stowaways hain't such fools as all that.'

"'I dunno,' said the first. 'I wish I 'ad arsked the Second what 'e thought about it.'

"'I don't think it was a stowaway, somehow,' I said, chipping in. 'What would a stowaway want aloft? I guess he'd be trying more for the Steward's pantry.'

"'You bet he would, hevry time,' said Stubbins. He lit his pipe, and sucked at it, slowly.

"'I don't hunderstand it, all ther same,' he remarked, after a moment's silence.

"'Neither do I,' I said. And after that I was quiet for a while, listening to the run of conversation on the subject.

"Presently, my glance fell upon Williams, the man who had spoken to me about 'shadders.' He was sitting in his bunk, smoking, and making no effort to join in the talk.

"I went across to him.

"'What do you think of it, Williams?' I asked. 'Do *you* think the Second Mate really saw anything?'

"He looked at me, with a sort of gloomy suspicion; but said nothing.

"I felt a trifle annoyed by his silence. After a few moments, I went on.

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"'Do you know, Williams, I'm beginning to understand what you meant that night, when you said there were too many shadows.'.

"'Wot yer mean?' he said, pulling his pipe from out of his mouth, and fairly surprised into answering.

"'What I say, of course,' I said. 'There *are* too many shadows.'

"He sat up, and leant forward out from his bunk, extending his hand and pipe. His eyes plainly showed his excitement.

"'Ave your seen . . .' he hesitated, and looked at me, struggling inwardly to express himself.

"'Well?' I prompted.

"For perhaps a minute he tried to say something. Then his expression altered suddenly from doubt, and something else more indefinite, to a pretty grim look of determination.

"He spoke.

"'I'm blimed,' he said, 'ef I don't tike er piy-diy out of 'er, shadders or no shadders.'

"I looked at him, with astonishment.

"'What's it got to do with your getting a pay-day out of her?' I asked.

"He nodded his head, with a sort of stolid resolution.

"'Look 'ere,' he said.

"I waited.

"'Ther crowd cleared'; he indicated with his hand and pipe towards the stern.

"'You mean in 'Frisco?' I said.

"'Yus,' he replied; ' 'an withart er cent of ther piy. I styed.'

"I comprehended him suddenly.

"'You think they saw,' I hesitated; then I said 'shadows?'

"He nodded; but said nothing.

"'And so they all bunked?'

"He nodded again, and began tapping out his pipe on the edge of his bunkboard.

"'And the officers and the Skipper?' I asked.

"'Fresh uns,' he said, and got out of his bunk; for eight bells was just then striking.

CHAPTER III

THE FOOLING WITH THE SAIL

"AS FOR the Second Mate, I have very little doubt *now*, but that he was beginning to realise there was something deeper and less understandable than he had at first dreamed of. Yet, all the same, I know he had to keep his guesses and half-formed opinions pretty well to himself; for the Old Man and the First Mate chaffed him unmercifully about this 'bogy.' This, I got from Tammy, who had heard them both ragging him during the second dog-watch the following day. There was another thing Tammy told me, that showed how the Second Mate bothered about his inability to understand the mysterious appearance and disappearance of the man he had seen go aloft. He had made Tammy give him every detail he could remember about the figure we had seen by the log-reel. What is more, the Second had not even affected to treat the matter lightly, nor as a thing to be sneered at; but had listened seriously, and asked a great many questions. It is very evident to me that he was reaching out towards the only possible conclusion. Though, goodness knows, it was one that was impossible and improbable enough.

"It was on the Wednesday night, after the five days of talk I have mentioned, that there came, to me and to those who *knew*, another element of fear. And yet, I can quite understand that, at *that* time, those who had seen nothing, would find little to be afraid of, in all that I am going to tell you. For, when all is said and done, it was nothing more than the blowing adrift of one of the sails; yet accompanied by what were really significant details—significant, that is, in the light of that which I and the Second Mate knew.

"Seven bells, and then one, had gone in the first watch, and our side was being roused out to relieve the Mate's. Most of the men were already out of their bunks, and sitting about on their sea-chests, getting their togs on.

"Suddenly, one of the 'prentices in the other watch put his head in through the doorway on the port side.

"'The Mate wants to know,' he said, 'which of you chaps made fast the fore royal, last watch.'

"'Wot's 'e want to know that for?' inquired one of the men.

"'The lee side's blowing adrift,' said the 'prentice. 'And he says that the chap who made it fast is to go up and see to it as soon as the watch is relieved.'

"'Oh! does 'e? Well, 'twasn't me, any-'ow,' replied the man. 'You'd better arsk sum of t'others.'

"'Ask what?' inquired Plummer, getting out of his bunk, sleepily.

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"The 'prentice repeated his message.

"The man yawned and stretched himself.

"'Let me see,' he muttered, and scratched his head with one hand, while he fumbled for his trousers with the others. ''oo made ther fore r'yal fast?' He got into his trousers, and stood up. 'Why, ther Or'nary, er course; 'oo else do yer suppose?'

"'That's all I wanted to know!' said the 'prentice, and went away.

"'Hi! Tom!' Stubbins sang out to the Ordinary. 'Wake up, you lazy young devil. Ther Mate's just sent to hinquire who it was made the fore royal fast. It's all blowin' adrift, and he says you're to get along up as soon as eight bells goes, and make it fast again.'

"Tom jumped out of his bunk, and began to dress, quickly.

"'Blowin' adrift!' he said. 'There ain't all that much wind; and I tucked the ends of the gaskets well in under the other turns.'

"'P'raps one of ther gaskets is rotten, and given way,' suggested Stubbins. 'Anyway, you'd better hurry up, it's just on eight bells.'

"'i, i, Sir,' said Tom, and followed the rest of us forrard. Reaching the fore rigging, he climbed into it, and began to make his way leisurely aloft. I could see him with a fair amount of distinctness, as the moon was very clear and bright, though getting old.

"I WENT over to the weather pin-rail, and leaned against it, watching him, while I filled my pipe. The other men, both the watch on deck and the watch below, had gone into the fo'cas'le, so that I imagined I was the only one about the maindeck. Yet, a minute later, I discovered that I was mistaken; for, as I proceeded to light up, I saw Williams, the young cockney, come out from under the lee of the house, and turn and look up at the Ordinary as he went steadily upwards.

"I remembered that he had said sails were always blowing adrift *at night*. I remembered the, then, unaccountable emphasis he had laid on those two words; and remembering that, I felt suddenly afraid. For, all at once, the absurdity had struck me of a sail—even a badly stowed one—blowing adrift in such fine and calm weather as we were then having. I wondered I had not seen before that there was something queer and unlikely about the affair. Sails don't blow adrift in fine weather, with the sea calm and the ship as steady as a rock. I moved away from the rail and went towards Williams.

"Williams turned towards me, and spoke.

"'Gawd!' he said, 'it's started agen!'

"'What?' I said. Though I knew what he meant.

"'Them syles,' he answered, and made a gesture towards the fore royal.

"I glanced up, briefly. All the lee side of the sail was adrift, from the bunt gasket outwards. Lower, I saw Tom; he was just hoisting himself into the t'gallant rigging.

"Williams spoke again.

"'We lost two on 'em just sime way, comin' art.'

"'Two of the men!' I exclaimed.

"'Yus!' he said tersely.

"I stood irresolute. I was positively stumped what to do for the best. That there was danger aloft, I was convinced; though if I had been asked my reasons for supposing this, they would have been hard to find. Yet of its existence, I was as certain as though my eyes already saw it. I wondered whether, being so ignorant of the form it would assume, I could stop it by joining Tom on the yard? This thought came as I stared up at the royal. Tom had reached the sail, and was standing on the foot-rope, close in to the bunt. He was bending over the yard, and reaching down for the slack of the sail. And then, as I looked, I saw the belly of the royal tossed up and down abruptly, as though a sudden heavy gust of wind had caught it.

"'I'm blimed. . . !' Williams began, with a sort of excited expectation. And then he stopped as abruptly as he had begun. For, in a moment, the sail had thrashed right over the after side of the yard, apparently knocking Tom clean from off the foot-rope.

"'My God!' I shouted out loud. 'He's gone!'

"For an instant there was a blur over my eyes, and Williams was singing out something that I could not catch. Then, just as quickly, it went, and I could see again, clearly.

"Williams was pointing, and I saw something black, swinging below the yard. Williams called out something fresh, and made a run for the fore rigging. I caught the last part—

"'. . . ther garskit.'

"Straightway, I knew that Tom had

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managed to grab the gasket as he fell, and I bolted after Williams to give him a hand in getting the youngster into safety.

"Down on deck, I caught the sound of running feet, and then the Second Mate's voice. He was asking what the devil was up; but I did not trouble to answer him then. I wanted all my breath to help me aloft. I knew very well that some of the gaskets were little better than old shakins; and, unless Tom got hold of something on the t'gallant yard below him, he might come down with a run any moment. I reached the top, and lifted myself over it in quick time. Williams was some distance above me. In less than half a minute, I reached the t'gallant yard. Williams had gone up to the royal. I slid out on to the t'gallant foot-rope until I was just below Tom; then I sung out to him to let himself down to me, and I would catch him. He made no answer, and I saw that he was hanging in a curiously limp fashion, and by one hand.

"Williams' voice came down to me from the royal yard. He was singing out to me to go up and give him a hand to pull Tom up on to the yard. When I reached him, he told me that the gasket had hitched itself round the lad's wrist. I bent beside the yard, and peered down. It was as Williams had said, and I realised how near a thing it had been. Strangely enough, even at that moment, the thought came to me how little wind there was. I remembered the wild way in which the sail had lashed at the boy.

"ALL this time, I was busily working, unreeving the port buntline. I took the end, made a running bowline with it round the gasket, and let the loop slide down over the boy's head and shoulders. Then I took a strain on it and tightened it under his arms. A minute later we had him safely on the yard between us. In the uncertain moonlight, I could just make out the mark of a great lump on his forehead, where the foot of the sail must have caught him when it knocked him over.

"I screwed round a bit, holding the jackstay with one hand, and steadying the insensible Ordinary with the other. In this way I could look below. At first, I could see nothing. Then the Second Mate's voice came up to me again.

" 'Who the hell are you? What are you doing?'

"I saw him now. He was standing at the foot of the weather t'gallant rigging, his face was turned upwards, peering round the after side of the mast. It showed to me only as a blurred, pale-coloured oval in the moonlight.

"He repeated his question.

" 'It's Williams and I, Sir,' I said. 'Tom here, has had an accident.'

"I stopped. He began to come higher up towards us. From the rigging to leeward there came suddenly a buzz of men talking.

"The Second Mate reached us.

" 'Well, what's up, anyway?' he inquired, suspiciously. 'What's happened?'

"He had bent forward, and was peering at Tom. I started to explain; but he cut me short with:

" 'Is he dead?'

" 'No, Sir,' I said. 'I don't think so; but the poor beggar's had a bad fall. He was hanging by the gasket when we got to him. The sail knocked him off the yard.'

" 'What?' he said, sharply.

" 'The wind caught the sail, and it lashed back over the yard. . . .'

" 'What wind?' he interrupted. 'There's no wind to do such a thing; you're talking nonsense!'

"It seemed to me that there was as much of bewilderment as anything else in his voice; yet I could tell that he was suspicious—though, of what, I doubted whether he himself could have told.

"He glanced at Williams, and seemed about to say something. Then, seeming to change his mind, he turned, and sung out to one of the men who had followed him aloft, to go down and pass out a coil of new, three-inch manilla, and a tail-block.

" 'Smartly now!' he concluded.

" 'i, i, Sir,' said the man, and went down swiftly.

"The Second Mate turned to me.

" 'When you've got Tom below, I shall want a better explanation of all this, than the one you've given me. It won't wash.'

" 'Very well, Sir,' I answered. 'But you won't get any other.'

" 'There's something too damned funny about it all. I shall have to report the matter to the Captain. I can't tell him that yarn—' He broke off abruptly.

" 'It's not the only damned funny thing that's happened aboard this old hooker,' I answered. '*You* ought to know that, Sir.'

" 'What do you mean?' he asked, quickly.

" 'Well, Sir,' I said, 'to be straight, what

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about that chap you sent us hunting after up the main the other night? That was a funny enough affair, wasn't it? This one isn't half so funny.'

"'That will do, Jessop!' he said, angrily. 'I won't have any back talk.' Yet there was something about his tone that told me I had got one in on my own. He seemed all at once less able to appear confident that I was telling him a fairy tale.

"After that, for perhaps half a minute, he said nothing. I guessed he was doing some hard thinking. When he spoke again it was on the matter of getting the Ordinary down on deck.

"'One of you'll have to go down the lee side and steady him down,' he concluded.

"He turned and looked downwards.

"'Are you bringing that gantline?' he sung out.

"'Yes, Sir,' I hear one of the men answer.

"A moment later, I saw the man's head appear over the top. He had the tail-block slung round his neck, and the end of the gantline over his shoulder.

"VERY soon we had the gantline rigged, and Tom down on deck. Then we took him into the fo'cas'le and put him in his bunk. The Second Mate had sent for some brandy, and now he started to dose him well with it. At the same time a couple of the men chafed his hands and feet. In a little, he began to show signs of coming around. Presently, after a sudden fit of coughing, he opened his eyes, with a surprised, bewildered stare. Then he caught at the edge of his bunk-board, and sat up giddily. One of the men steadied him, while the Second Mate stood back and eyed him critically. The boy rocked as he sat, and put up his hand to his head.

"'Here,' said the Second Mate, 'take another drink.'

"Tom caught his breath and choked a little; then he spoke.

"'By gum!' he said, 'my head does ache.'

"He put up his hand again, and felt at the lump on his forehead. Then he bent forward and stared round at the men grouped about his bunk.

"'What's up?' he inquired, in a confused sort of way, and seeming as if he could not see us clearly.

"'What's up?' he asked again.

"'That's just what I want to know!' said the Second Mate.

"'I ain't been snoozin' while there's been a job on?' Tom inquired, anxiously.

"He looked round at the men appealingly.

"'It's knocked 'im dotty, strikes me,' said one of the men, audibly.

"'No,' I said, answering Tom's question. 'You've had—'

"'Shut that, Jessop!' said the Second Mate quickly, interrupting me. 'I want to hear what the boy's got to say for himself.'

"He turned again to Tom.

"'You were up at the fore royal,' he prompted.

"'I carn't say I was, Sir,' said Tom, doubtfully.

I could see that he had not gripped the Second Mate's meaning.

"'But you were!' said the Second, with some impatience. 'It was blowing adrift, and I sent you up to shove a gasket round it.'

"'Blowin' adrift, Sir?' said Tom, dully.

"'Yes! blowing adrift. Don't I speak plainly?'

"The dullness went from Tom's face, suddenly.

"'So it was, Sir!' he said, his memory returning. 'The bloomin' sail got chock full of wind. It caught me bang in the face.'

"He paused a moment.

"'I believe . . .' he began, and then stopped once more.

"'Go on!' said the Second Mate. 'Spit it out!'

"'I don't know, Sir,' Tom said. 'I don't understand . . .'

"He hesitated again.

"'That's all I can remember,' he muttered, and put his hand up to the bruise on his forehead, as though trying to remember something.

"In the momentary silence that succeeded, I caught the voice of Stubbins.

"'There hain't hardly no wind,' he was saying, in a puzzled tone.

"There was a low murmur of assent from the surrounding men.

"The Second Mate said nothing, and I glanced at him curiously. Was he beginning to see, I wondered, how useless it was to try to find any sensible explanation of the affair?

"Even now I am rather puzzled by his attitude to us aloft. Sometimes I have thought that he must have suspected us of trying to play off some trick on him—perhaps, at the time, he still half suspected one of us of being in some way

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connected with the other business. Or, again, he may have been trying to fight against the conviction that was being forced upon him, that there was really something impossible and beastly about the old packet. Of course, these are only superstitions.

"And then, close upon this, there were further developments.

CHAPTER IV

THE END OF WILLIAMS

"AS I have said, there was a lot of talk, among the crowd of us forrard, about Tom's strange accident. None of the men knew that Williams and I had seen it *happen*. Stubbins gave it as his opinion that Tom had been sleepy, and missed the foot-rope. Tom, of course, would not have this by any means. Yet, he had no one to appeal to; for at that time he was just as ignorant as the rest that we had seen the sail flap up over the yard.

"Stubbins insisted that it stood to reason it couldn't be the wind. There wasn't any, he said; and the rest of the men agreed with him.

"'Well,' I said, 'I don't know about all that. I'm a bit inclined to think Tom's yarn is the truth.'

"'How do you make that hout?' Stubbins asked, unbelievingly. 'There hain't nothin' like enough wind.'

"'What about the place on his forehead?' I inquired, in turn. 'How are you going to explain that?'

"'I 'spect he knocked himself there when he slipped,' he answered.

"'Likely 'nuff,' agreed old Jaskett, who was sitting smoking on a chest near by.

"'Well, you're both a damn long way out of it!' Tom chipped in, pretty warm. 'I wasn't asleep; an' the sail did bloomin' well hit me.'

"'Don't you be impudent, young feller,' said Jaskett.

"I joined in again.

"'There's another thing, Stubbins,' I said. "The gasket Tom was hanging by was on the after side of the yard. That looks as if the sail might have flapped it over? If there were wind enough to do the one, it seems to me that it might have done the other.'

"'Do you mean that it was hunder ther yard, or hover ther top?' he asked.

"'Over the top, of course. What's more, the foot of the sail was hanging way over the after part of the yard, in a bight.'

"Stubbins was plainly surprised at that, and before he was ready with his next objection, Plummer spoke.

"'''Oo saw it?' he asked.

"'I saw it!' I said a bit sharply. 'So did Williams; so—for that matter—did the Second Mate.'

"Plummer relapsed into silence, and smoked.

"The three following nights passed quietly; and then, on the fourth, all those curious signs and hints culminated suddenly in something extraordinarily grim.

"I remember that fourth night well. It was a clear, star-lit, moonless sort of night: at least, I think there was no moon; or, at any rate, the moon could have been little more than a thin crescent, for it was near the dark-time.

"The wind had breezed up a bit; but still remained steady. We were slipping along at about six or seven knots an hour. It was our middle watch on deck, and the ship was full of the blow and hum of the wind aloft. Williams and I were the only ones about the maindeck. He was leaning over the weather pin-rail, smoking; while I was pacing up and down, between him and the fore-hatch. Stubbins was on the look-out.

"Two bells had gone some minutes, and I was wishing to goodness that it was eight, and time to turn-in. Suddenly, overhead, there sounded a sharp crack, like the report of a rifle shot. It was followed instantly by the rattle and crash of sailcloth thrashing in the wind.

"Williams jumped away from the rail, and ran aft a few steps. I followed him, and, together, we stared upwards to see what had gone. Indistinctly, I made out that the weather sheet of the fore t'gallant had carried away, and the clew of the sail was whirling and banging about in the air, and, every few moments, hitting the steel yard a blow, like the thump of a great sledge hammer.

"'It's the shackle, or one of the links that's gone, I think,' I shouted to Williams, above the noise of the sail. 'That's the spectacle that's hitting the yard.'

"'Yus!' he shouted back, and went to get hold of the clewline. I ran to give him a hand. At the same moment, I caught the Second Mate's voice away aft, shouting. Then came the noise of running feet, and the rest of the watch, and the Second Mate, were with us almost at the same moment. In a few minutes we had the yard lowered and the sail clewed

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up. Then Williams and I went aloft to see where the sheet had gone. It was much as I had supposed; the spectacle was all right, but the pin had gone out of the shackle, and the shackle itself was jammed into the sheavehole in the yard arm.

"WILLIAMS sent me down for another pin, while he unbent the clewline, and overhauled it down to the sheet. When I returned with the fresh pin, I screwed it into the shackle, clipped on the clewline, and sung out to the men to take a pull on the rope. This they did, and at the second heave the shackle came away. When it was high enough, I went up on to the t'gallant yard, and held the chain, while Williams shackled it into the spectacle. Then he bent on the clewline afresh, and sung out to the Second Mate that we were ready to hoist away.

"Yer'd better go down an' give 'em a 'aul,' he said. 'I'll sty an' light up ther syle.'

"'Right ho, Williams, I said, getting into the rigging. 'Don't let the ship's bogy run away with you.'

"This remark I made in a moment of lightheartedness, such as will come to any one aloft, at times. I was exhilarated for the time being, and quite free from the sense of fear that had been with me so much of late. I suppose this was due to the freshness of the wind.

"'There's more'n one!' he said, in that curiously short way of his.

"I was suddenly serious. The *reality* of all the impossible details of the past weeks came back to me, vivid, and beastly.

"'What do you mean, Williams?' I asked him.

"But he had shut up, and would say nothing.

"'What do you know—how much do you know?' I went on, quickly. 'Why did you never tell me that you—'

"The Second Mate's voice interrupted me, abruptly:

"'Now then, up there! Are you going to keep us waiting all night? One of you come down and give us a pull with the ha'lyards. The other stay up and light up the gear.'

"'i, i, Sir,' I shouted back.

"Then I turned to Williams, hurriedly.

"'Look here, Williams,' I said. 'If you think there is *really* a danger in your being alone up here . . .' I hesitated for words to express what I meant. Then I went on. 'Well, I'll jolly well stay up with you.'

"The Second Mate's voice came again.

"'Come on now, one of you! Make a move! What the hell are you doing?'

"'Shall I stay?' I asked definitely.

"'Garn!' he said. 'Don't yer fret yourself. I'll tike 'er bloomin' piy-diy out of 'er. Blarst 'em. I ain't funky of 'em.'

"I went. That was the last word Williams spoke to any one living.

"I reached the decks, and tailed on to the haulyards.

"We had nearly mast-headed the yard, and the Second Mate was looking up at the dark outline of the sail, ready to sing out 'Belay'; when, all at once, there came a queer sort of muffled shout from Williams.

"'Vast hauling, you men,' shouted the Second Mate.

"We stood silent, and listened.

"'What's that, Williams?' he sung out. 'Are you all clear?'

"For nearly half a minute we stood, listening; but there came no reply. Some of the men said afterwards that they noticed a curious rattling and vibrating noise aloft, that sounded faintly above the hum and swirl of the wind. Like the sound of loose ropes being shaken and slatted together, you know. Whether this noise was really heard, or whether it was something that had no existence outside of their imaginations, I cannot say. I heard nothing of it; but then I was at the tail end of the rope, and furthest from the fore rigging; while those who heard it were on the fore part of the haulyards, and close up to the shrouds.

"The Second Mate put his hands to his mouth.

"'Are you all clear there?' he shouted again.

"The answer came, unintelligible and unexpected. It ran like this—

"'Blarst yer . . . I've styed . . . Did yer think . . . drive . . . damned piy-diy.' And then there was a sudden silence.

"I stared up at the dim sail, astonished.

"'He's dotty!' said Stubbins, who had been told to come off the look-out and give us a pull.

"''e's as mad as a bloomin' 'atter,' said Quoin, who was standing foreside of me. ''e's been queer all along.'

"'Silence there!' shouted the Second Mate. Then:

"'Williams!'

"No answer.

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L O S T

Where'll I eat? Where'll I sleep? Where's my girl?

Last week on KP I kept thinking, "When I get to New York on my furlough, that'll be the day!"

So here I am, only I don't know my way around any more'n the Man From Mars. Can't even find my girl in this whale of a big and busy station.

Tell me, will you, what's a guy to do?

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"'Williams!' more loudly.

"Still no answer.

"Then:

"'Damn you, you jumped-up cockney crocodile! Can't you hear? Are you blooming well deaf?'

"There was no answer, and the Second Mate turned to me.

"'Jump aloft, smartly now, Jessop, and see what's wrong!'

"'i, i, Sir,' I said, and made a run for the rigging. I felt a bit queer. Had Williams gone mad? He certainly always had been a bit funny. Or—and the thought came with a jump—had he seen. . . . I did not finish. Suddenly, up aloft, there sounded a frightful scream. I stopped, with my hand on the sheer-pole. The next instant, something fell out of the darkness—a heavy body, that struck the deck near the waiting men, with a tremendous crash and a loud, ringing, wheezy sound that sickened me. Then, for the space of several seconds, there was a dead silence among the crowd; and it seemed to me that the wind had in it a strange moaning note.

"IT WAS Williams right enough. The Second Mate told a couple of the men to lift him and straighten him out on the hatch. Then he went aft to call the Skipper. He returned in a couple of minutes with an old Ensign which he spread over the poor beggar. Almost directly, the Captain came hurrying forrard along the decks. He pulled back one end of the Ensign, and looked; then he put it back quietly, and the Second Mate explained all that we knew, in a few words.

"'Would you leave him where he is, Sir?' he asked.

"'The night's fine,' said the Captain. 'You may as well leave the poor devil there.'

"He turned and went aft, slowly. The man who was holding the light, swept it round so that it showed the place where Williams had struck the deck.

"The Second Mate spoke abruptly.

"'Get a broom and a couple of buckets, some of you.'

"We went into the fo'cas'le. Every one was moody and frightened. For a little while, we sat about in our bunks and on the chests, and no one said a word. The watch below were all asleep, and not one of them knew what had happened.

"All at once, Plummer, whose wheel it was, stepped over the starboard washboard, into the fo'cas'le.

"'What's up, anyway?' he asked. 'Is Williams much 'urt?'

"'He fell from the t'gallant rigging!' I said.

"'Where is 'e?' he repeated.

"'Smashed up,' I said. 'He's lying on the hatch.'

"'Dead?' he asked.

"I nodded.

"After a moment's silence, Plummer spoke again.

"'I 'eard 'im screech, when I was at ther wheel. 'e must 'ave got 'urt up aloft.'

"Stubbins struck a match and proceeded to relight his pipe.

"'How d'yer mean?' he asked, speaking for the first time.

"''ow do I mean? Well, I can't say. Maybe 'e jammed 'is fingers between ther parrel an' ther mast.'

"'What about 'is swearin' at ther Second Mate? Was that 'cause 'e'd jammed 'is fingers?' put in Quoin.

"'I never 'eard about that,' said Plummer. ''oo 'eard 'im?'

"'I should think heverybody in ther bloomin' ship heard him,' Stubbins answered. 'All ther same, I hain't sure he *was* swearin' at ther Second Mate. I thought at first he'd gone dotty an' was cussin' him; but somehow it don't seem likely, now I come to think. It don't stand to reason he should go to cuss ther man. There was nothin' to go cussin' about. What's more, he didn't seem ter be talkin' down to us on deck—what I could make hout. 'sides, what would he want ter go talkin' to ther Second about his payday?'

"He looked across to where I was sitting. Jock, who was smoking, quietly, on the chest next to me, took his pipe slowly out from between his teeth.

"'Ye're no far oot, Stubbins, I'm thinkin'. Ye're no far oot,' he said, nodding his head.

"Stubbins still continued to gaze fixedly at me.

"'What's your idee?' he said, abruptly.

"It may have been my fancy; but it seemed to me that there was something deeper than the mere sense the question conveyed.

"I glanced at him. I couldn't have said myself just what my idea was.

"'I don't know!' I answered, a little adrift. 'He didn't strike me as cursing at the Second Mate. That is, I should say, after the first minute.'

"'Just what I say,' he replied. 'Another thing—don't it strike you as bein' bloom-

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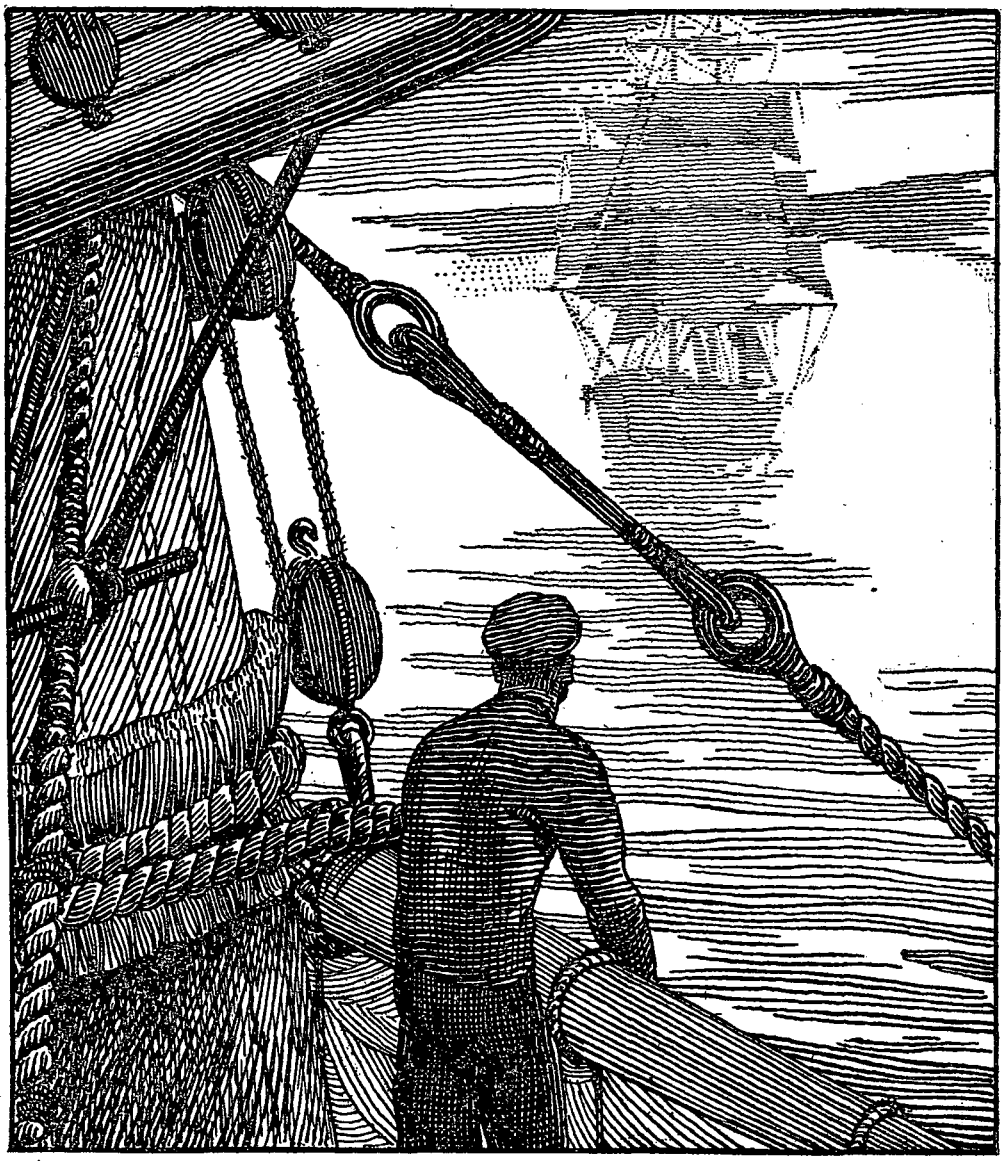

"As the great ship came closer, it grew less distinct!"

in' queer about Tom nearly comin' down by ther run, an' then *this?*'

"I nodded.

"'It would have been all hup with Tom, if it hadn't been for ther gasket.'

"He paused. After a moment, he went on again.

"'That was honly three or four nights ago!'

"'Well,' said Plummer. 'What are yer drivin' at?'

"'Nothin',' answered Stubbins. 'Honly it's damned queer. Looks as though ther ship might be unlucky, after all.'

"'Well,' agreed Plummer. 'Things 'as been a bit funny lately; and then there's what's 'appened ter-night. I shall 'ang on pretty tight ther next time I go aloft.'

"Old Jaskett took his pipe from his mouth, and sighed.

"'Things is going wrong 'most every night,' he said, almost pathetically. 'It's

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as diff'rent as chalk 'n' cheese ter what it were w'en we started this 'ere trip. I thought it were all 'ellish rot about 'er bein' 'aunted; but it's not, seem'ly.'

"He stopped and expectorated.

"'She hain't haunted,' said Stubbins. 'Leastways, not like you mean. . . .'

"He paused, as though trying to grasp some elusive thought.

"'Eh?' said Jaskett, in the interval.

"Stubbins continued, without noticing the query. He appeared to be answering some half-formed thought in his own brain, rather than Jaskett:

"'Things is queer—an' it's been a bad job tonight. I don't savvy one bit what Williams was sayin' of hup aloft. I've thought sometimes he'd somethin' on 'is mind. . . .'

"Then, after a pause of about half a minute, he said this:

"'*Who* was he sayin' that to?'

"'Eh?' said Jaskett, again, with a puzzled expression.

"'I was thinkin',' said Stubbins, knocking out his pipe on the edge of the chest. 'P'raps you're right, hafter all.'

CHAPTER V

ANOTHER MAN TO THE WHEEL

"THE conversation had slacked off. We were all moody and shaken, and I know I, for one, was thinking some rather troublesome thoughts.

"Suddenly, I heard the sound of the Second's whistle. Then his voice came along the deck:

"'Another man to the wheel!'

"'E's singin' out for some one to go aft an' relieve ther wheel,' said Quoin, who had gone to the door to listen. 'Yer'd better 'urry up, Plummer.'

"'What's ther time?' asked Plummer, standing up and knocking out his pipe. Must be close on 'ter four bells. 'oo's next wheel is it?'

"'It's all right, Plummer,' I said, getting up from the chest on which I had been sitting. 'I'll go along. It's my wheel, and it only wants a couple of minutes to four bells.'

"Plummer sat down again, and I went out of the fo'cas'le. Reaching the poop, I met Tammy on the lee side, pacing up and down.

"'Who's at the wheel?' I asked him, in astonishment.

"'The Second Mate,' he said, in a shaky sort of voice. 'He's waiting to be relieved. I'll tell you all about it as soon as I get a chance.'

"I went on aft to the wheel.

"'Who's that?' the Second inquired.

"'It's Jessop, Sir,' I answered.

"He gave me the course, and then, without another word, went forrard along the poop. On the break, I heard him call Tammy's name, and then for some minutes he was talking to him; though what he was saying, I could not possibly hear. For my part, I was tremendously curious to know why the Second Mate had taken the wheel. I knew that if it were just a matter of bad steering on Tammy's part, he would not have dreamt of doing such a thing.

"Presently, the Second Mate left Tammy, and commenced to walk the weather side of the deck. Once he came right aft, and, stooping down, peered under the wheel-box; but never addressed a word to me. Sometime later, he went down the weather ladder on to the maindeck. Directly afterwards, Tammy came running up to the lee side of the wheel-box.

"'I've seen it again!' he said, gasping with sheer nervousness.

"'What?' I said.

"'That *thing*,' he answered. Then he leant across the wheel-box, and lowered his voice.

"'It came over the lee rail—*up out of the sea*,' he added, with an air of telling something unbelievable.

"I turned more towards him; but it was too dark to see his face with any distinctness. I felt suddenly husky. 'My God!' I thought. And then I made a silly effort to protest; but he cut me short with a certain impatient hopelessness.

"'For God's sake, Jessop,' he said, 'do stow all that! It's no good. I must have some one to talk to, or I shall go dotty.'

"'Well, I'd been here about ten minutes, or a quarter of an hour, and I was feeling rotten about Williams, and trying to forget it all and keep the ship on her course, and all that; when, all at once, I happened to glance to loo'ard, and there I saw it climbing over the rail. My God! I didn't know what to do. The Second Mate was standing forrard on the break of the poop, and I was here all by myself. I felt as if I were frozen stiff.

"'WHEN it came towards me, I let go of the wheel, and yelled and bunked forrard to the Second Mate. He caught hold of me and shook me; but I

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was so jolly frightened, I couldn't say a word. I could only keep on pointing. The Second kept asking me "Where?" And then, all at once, I found I couldn't see the thing. I don't know whether he saw it. I'm not at all certain he did. He just told me to damn well get back to the wheel, and stop making a damned fool of myself.

"'I said out straight I wouldn't go. So he blew his whistle, and sung out for some one to come aft and take it. Then he ran and got hold of the wheel himself. You know the rest.'

"'I'm sure I don't know what it all means, Tammy,' I answered. 'I'm just as much in the dark, there, as you are. And I don't know whether they're real—that is, not as we consider things real in our world.'

"We were silent for a couple of moments.

"Then he spoke again:

"'Is the ship haunted?'

"'No,' I said, at length. 'I don't think she is. I mean, not in that way.'

"'Go on!' he said, with an impatient, nervous movement. I had never seen him so frightened.

"'About that thing you saw to-night,' I went on. 'You say it came over the lee-rail, up on to the poop?'

"'Yes,' he answered.

"'Well, the thing I saw, *came up out of the sea, and went back into the sea.*'

"'Jove!' he said; and then: 'Yes, go on!'

"'MY IDEA is, that this ship is open to be boarded by those things,' I explained. 'What they are, of course I don't know. They look like men—in lots of ways. But—well, the Lord knows what's in the sea. I don't know a bit whether they're flesh and blood, or whether they're what we should call ghosts—'

"'They can't be flesh and blood,' Tammy interrupted. 'Where do they come from?'

"'Out of the sea,' I told him. 'You saw for yourself!'

"'Then why don't other vessels have them coming aboard?' he said. 'How do you account for that?'

"'Why, I believe that this ship is open, as I've told you—exposed, unprotected, or whatever you like to call it. I should say it's reasonable to think that all the things of the material world are barred, as it were, from the immaterial; but that in some cases the barrier may be broken down. That's what may have happened to this ship.'

'Suppose the earth were inhabited by two kinds of life. We're one, and *they're* the other.'

"'Go on!' he said.

"'Well,' I said. 'The earth may be just as real to them, as to us.

"'Yes,' he said. 'Go on!'

"'Well, if we were in what I might call a healthy atmosphere, they would be quite beyond our power to see or feel, or

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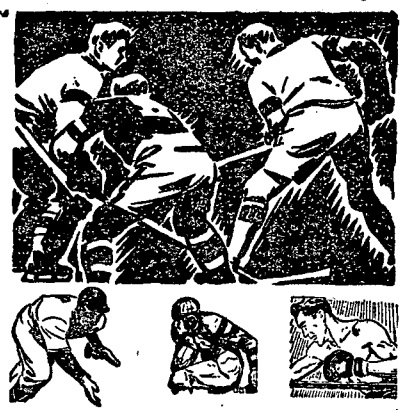

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anything. And the same with them; but the more we're like *this*, the more *real* and actual they could grow *to us*. See? That is, the more we should become able to appreciate their form of materialness. That's all. I can't make it any clearer.'

"'Then, after all, you *really* think they're ghosts, or something of that sort?' Tammy said.

"'I suppose it does come to that,' I answered. 'I mean that, anyway, I don't think they're our ideas of flesh and blood. But, of course, it's silly to say much; and, after all, you must remember that I may be-all wrong.'

"'I think you ought to tell the Second Mate all this,' he said. 'If it's really as you say, the ship ought to be put into the nearest port, and jolly well burnt.'

"'The Second Mate couldn't do anything,' I replied. 'Even if he believed it all; which we're not certain he would.'

"'Perhaps not,' Tammy answered. 'But if you could get him to believe it, he might explain the whole business to the Skipper, and then something might be done. It's not safe as it is.'

"'He'd only get jeered at again,' I said, rather hopelessly.

"'No,' said Tammy. 'Not after what's happened to-night.'

"'Perhaps not,' I replied, doubtfully. And just then the Second Mate came back on to the poop, and Tammy cleared away from the wheelbox, leaving me with a worrying feeling that I ought to do something.

CHAPTER VI

THE COMING OF THE MIST

"WE BURIED Williams at midday. Poor beggar! It had been so sudden. All day the men were awed and gloomy, and there was a lot of talk about there being a Jonah aboard. If they'd only know what Tammy and I, and perhaps the Second Mate, knew!

"And then the next thing came—the mist.

"It was broad daylight when the thing came.

"The wind had died away to a light breeze, and I was working at the main rigging, along with Plummer, putting on seizings.

"'Looks as if 'twere middlin' 'ot,' he remarked.

"'It's gettin' quite 'azy.'

"I glanced up, quickly. At first, I could see nothing. Then, I saw what he meant. The air had a wavy, strange, unnatural appearance; something like the heated air over the top of an engine's funnel, that you can often see when no smoke is coming out.

"'Must be the heat,' I said. 'Though I don't remember ever seeing anything just like it before.'

"'Nor me,' Plummer agreed.

"It could not have been a minute later when I looked up again, and was astonished to find that the whole ship was surrounded by a thinnish haze that quite hid the horizon.

"'By Jove! Plummer,' I said. 'How queer!'

"'Yes,' he said, looking round. 'I never seen anythin' like it before—not in these parts.'

"'Heat wouldn't do that!' I said.

"'N-no,' he said, doubtfully.

"We went on with our work again—occasionally exchanging an odd word or two. Presently, after a little time of silence, I bent forward and asked him to pass me up the spike. He stooped and picked it up from the deck, where it had tumbled. As he held it out to me, I saw the stolid expression on his face change suddenly to a look of complete surprise. He opened his mouth.

"'By gum!' he said. 'It's gone.'

"I turned quickly, and looked. And so it had—the whole sea showing clear and bright, right away to the horizon.

"During the rest of the watch, and indeed all day, there was no further sign of anything unusual. Only, when the evening came (in the second dog-watch it was) I saw the mist rise faintly—the setting sun shining through it, dim and unreal.

"I knew then, as a certainty, that it was not caused by heat.

"And that was the beginning of it.

"The next day, I kept a pretty close watch, during all my time on deck; but the atmosphere remained clear. Yet, I heard from one of the chaps in the Mate's watch, that it had been hazy during part of the time he was at the wheel.

"'Comin' an' goin', like,' he described it to me, when I questioned him about it. He thought it might be heat.

"Then, on the following day, something happened that set me wondering more than ever, and showed me how right I had been in feeling the mist to be something unnatural. It was in this way.

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"Five bells, in the eight to twelve morning watch, had gone. I was at the wheel. The sky was perfectly clear—not a cloud to be seen, even on the horizon. It was hot, standing at the wheel; for there was scarcely any wind, and I was feeling drowsy. The Second Mate was down on the maindeck with the men, seeing about some job he wanted done; so that I was on the poop alone.

"PRESENTLY, with the heat, and the sun beating right down on me, I grew thirsty; and, for want of something better, I pulled out a bit of plug I had on me, and bit off a chew; though, as a rule, it is not a habit of mine. After a little, naturally enough, I glanced around for the spittoon; but discovered that it was not there. Probably it had been taken forrard when the decks were washed, to give it a scrub. So, as there was no one on the poop, I left the wheel, and stepped aft to the taffrail. It was thus that I came to see something altogether unthought of—a full-rigged ship, close-hauled on the port tack, a few hundred yards on our starboard quarter. Her sails were scarcely filled by the light breeze, and flapped as she lifted to the swell of the sea. She appeared to have very little way through the water, certainly not more than a knot an hour. Away aft, hanging from the gaff-end, was a string of flags. Evidently, she was signalling to us. All this, I saw in a flash, and I just stood and stared, astonished. I was astonished because I had not seen her earlier. In that light breeze, I knew that she must have been in sight for at least a couple of hours. Yet I could think of nothing rational to satisfy my wonder. There she was—of that much, I was certain. And yet, how had she come there without my seeing her, before?

"All at once, as I stood, staring, I heard the wheel behind me, spin rapidly. Instinctively, I jumped to get hold of the spokes; for I did not want the steering gear jammed. Then I turned again to have another look at the other ship; but, to my utter bewilderment, *there was no sign of her*—nothing but the calm ocean, spreading away to the distant horizon. I blinked my eyelids a bit, and pushed the hair off my forehead. Then, I stared again; but there was no vestige of her—and absolutely nothing unusual, except a faint, tremulous quiver in the air. And the blank surface of the sea, reaching everywhere to the empty horizon.

"Had she foundered? I asked myself, naturally enough; and, for the moment, I really wondered.

"I searched round the sea for wreckage; but there was nothing, not even an odd hencoop, or a piece of deck furniture; and so I threw away that idea, as impossible.

"Then, as I stood, I got another thought, or, perhaps, an intuition, and I asked myself, seriously, whether this disappearing ship might not be in some way connected with the other queer things. It occurred to me then, that the vessel I had seen was nothing real, and, perhaps, did not exist outside of my brain. I considered the idea gravely. It helped to explain the thing and I could think of nothing else that would. Had she been real, I felt sure that others aboard us would have been bound to have seen her long before I had. . . . I got a bit muddled there, with trying to think it out; and then, abruptly, the reality of the other ship came back to me—every rope and sail and spar, you know. And I remembered how she had lifted to the heave of the sea, and how the sails had flapped in the light breeze. And the string of flags! She had been signalling us.

"And then a fresh thought came to me. How long had we been like that? I puzzled for a few moments. It was now that I recollected that we had sighted several vessels on the morning of the day when the mist appeared; and since then, we had seen nothing. This, to say the least, should have struck me as queer; for some of the other packets were homeward bound along with us, and steering the same course. Consequently, with the weather being fine, and the wind next to nothing, they should have been in sight all the time. This reasoning seemed to me to show, unmistakably, some connection between the coming of the mist, and our inability to *see*. So that it is possible we had been in that extraordinary state of blindness for nearly three days.

"IN MY mind, the last glimpse of that ship on the quarter came back to me. And, I remember, a curious thought got me, that I had looked at her from out of some other dimension. For a while, you know, I really believe the mystery of the idea, and that it might be the actual truth, took me; instead of my realizing just all that it might mean. It seemed so exactly to express all the half-

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defined thoughts that had come since seeing that other packet on the quarter.

"Suddenly, behind me, there came a rustle and rattle of the sails; and, in the same instant, I heard the Skipper saying:

"'Where the devil have you got her to, Jessop?'

"I whirled round to the wheel.

"'I don't know—Sir,' I faltered.

"I had forgotten even that I was at the wheel.

"'Don't know!' he shouted. 'I should damned well think you don't. Starboard your helm, you fool. You'll have us all aback!'

"'i, i, Sir,' I answered, and hove the wheel over. I did it almost mechanically; for I was still dazed, and had not yet had time to collect my senses.

"During the following half-minute, I was only conscious, in a confused sort of way, that the Old Man was rating at me. This feeling of bewilderment passed off, and I found that I was peering blankly into the binnacle, at the compass-card; yet, until then, entirely without being aware of the fact. Now, however, I saw that the ship was coming back on to her course. Goodness knows how much she had been off!

"He shouted, angrily, 'What's the matter with you? What have you been doing with the ship? Answer me now!'

"'I was looking at that ship away on the starboard quarter, Sir,' I blurted out. 'She's been signalling—'

"'What!' he cut me short with. 'What ship?'

"He turned, quickly, and looked over the quarter. Then he wheeled round to me again.

"'There's no ship! What do you mean by trying to spin up a cuffer like that?'

"'There is, Sir,' I answered. 'It's out there—' I pointed.

He came a step towards me, and stared into my face. I believe the old ass thought I was a bit mad; anyway, without a word, he went to the break of the poop.

"'Mr. Tulipson,' he sung out.

"'Yes, Sir,' I heard the Second Mate reply.

"'Send another man to the wheel.'

"'Very good, Sir,' the Second answered.

"A couple of minutes later, old Jaskett came up to relieve me. I gave him the course, and he repeated it.

"'What's up, mate?' he asked me, as I stepped off the grating.

"'Nothing much,' I said, and went forward to where the Skipper was standing on the break of the poop. I gave him the course; but the crabby old devil took no notice of me, whatever. When I got down on to the maindeck, I went up to the Second, and gave it to him. He answered me civilly enough, and then asked me what I had been doing to put the Old Man's back up.

"'I told him there's a ship on the starboard quarter, signalling us,' I said.

"'There's no ship out there, Jessop,' the Second Mate replied, looking at me with a queer, inscrutable expression.

"'There is, Sir,' I began. 'I—'

"'That will do, Jessop!' he said. 'Go forrard and have a smoke. I shall want you then to give a hand with these footropes. You'd better bring a serving-mallet aft with you when you come.'

"I hesitated a moment, partly in anger; but more I think, in doubt.

"'i, i, Sir,' I muttered, at length, and went forrard.

CHAPTER VII

AFTER THE COMING OF THE MIST

"AFTER the coming of the mist, things seemed to develop pretty quickly. In the following two or three days a good deal happened.

"On the night of the day on which the Skipper had sent me away from the wheel, it was our watch on the deck from eight o'clock to twelve, and my look-out from ten to twelve.

"As I paced slowly to and fro across the fo'cas'le head, I was thinking about the affair of the morning. At first, my thoughts were about the Old Man. I cursed him thoroughly to myself, for being a pig-headed fool, until it occurred to me that if I had been in his place, and come on deck to find the ship almost aback, and the fellow at the wheel staring out across the sea, instead of attending to his business, I should most certainly have kicked up a thundering row. And then, I had been an ass to tell him about the ship. I should never have done such a thing, if I had not been a bit adrift. Most likely the old chap thought I was cracked.

"Abruptly, as I walked backwards and forwards, taking occasional glances over the sea (which was almost calm), my eye caught the glow of a light out in the darkness. I stool still, and stared. I wondered whether it was the light of a ves-

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sel. In that case we were no longer enveloped in that extraordinary atmosphere. I bent forward, and gave the thing my more immediate attention. I saw then that it was undoubtedly the green light of a vessel on our port bow. It was plain that she was bent on crossing our bows. What was more, she was dangerously near. Instantly, I turned and, putting my hands up to my mouth, hailed the Second Mate:

"'Light on the port bow, Sir.'

"The next moment his hail came back:

"'Whereabouts?'

"'He must be blind,' I said to myself.

"'About two points on the bow, Sir,' I sung out.

I waited, pretty anxiously, watching and listening. Then all at once, I heard steps coming along the deck, forrard, and the 'prentice, whose time-keeping it was, came up on to the fo'cas'le head.

"'The Second Mate says he can't see any light, Jessop,' he said, coming over to where I stood. 'Whereabouts is it?'

"'I don't know,' I answered. 'I've lost sight of it myself. It was a green light, about a couple of points on the port bow. It seemed fairly close.'

"'All right, keep your rag in,' he said, and went aft to report to the Second Mate.

"FIVE minutes later, it might have been, I saw the light again. It was broad on the bow, and told me plainly enough that she had up with her helm to escape being run down. I did not wait a moment; but sung out to the Second Mate that there was a green light about four points on the port bow. By Jove! it must have been a close shave. The light did not *seem* to be more than about a hundred yards away.

"Even as the thought came into my head, the light faded and vanished; and I caught the Second Mate's voice.

"'Whereaway?' he was singing out anxiously.

"'It's gone again, Sir,' I answered.

"A minute later, I heard him coming along the deck.

"He reached the foot of the starboard ladder.

"'Where are you, Jessop?' he inquired.

"'Here, Sir,' I said, and went to the top of the weather ladder.

"He came up slowly on to the fo'cas'le head.

"All at once, he faced round on me with a sudden question:

"'Where's she gone to? If she's shifted her bearing as quickly as all that, she must be precious close. We should be able to see her spars and sails!'

"'It's queer, Sir,' I assented. My voice shook a little.

"'Damned queer,' he said. 'So damned queer that I'm inclined to think you've made a mistake.'

"'No, Sir. I'm dead certain it was a light.'

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"'Where's the ship, then?' he asked.

"'I can't say, Sir. That's what's been puzzling me.'

"'You go along forrard and turn in,' he said, not altogether unkindly. 'You know, you're getting to fancy things too much!'

"'I'm sure I'm not, Sir! I'm perfectly well. I—'

"'That will do!' he interrupted, sharply. 'You go and have a sleep.'

"I GAVE a short curse, under my breath and went slowly forrard. I was getting maddened with being treated as if I were quite insane.

"'By God!' I said to myself. 'Wait till the fools know what I know— Just wait!'

"I entered the fo'cas'le, through the port doorway, and went across to my chest, and sat down. I felt angry and tired and miserable.

"Quoin and Plummer were sitting close by, playing cards and smoking. Stubbins lay in his bunk, watching them, and also smoking. As I sat down, he put his head forward over the bunkboard, and regarded me in a curious, meditative way.

"'What's hup with ther Second officer?' he asked, after a short stare.

"I looked at him, and the other two men looked up at me. I felt I should go off with a bang, if I did not say something, and I let out pretty stiffly, telling them the whole business. Yet, I had seen enough to know that it was no good trying to explain things; so I just told them the plain, bald facts, and left the explanations as much alone as possible.

"'Three times, you say?' said Stubbins when I had finished.

"'Yes,' I assented.

"'An' ther Old Man sent yer from ther wheel this mornin', 'cause yer 'appened ter see a ship 'e couldn't,' Plummer added in a reflective tone.

"'Yes,' I said again.

"I thought I saw him look at Quoin significantly; but Stubbins, I noticed, looked only at me.

"'I reckon ther Second thinks you're a bit hoff colour,' he remarked, after a short pause.

"'The Second Mate's a fool.' I said, with some bitterness. 'A confounded fool!'

"'I hain't so sure about that,' he replied. 'It's bound ter seem queer ter him. I don't hunderstand it myself. . . .'

"He lapsed into silence, and smoked.

"'I carn't understand 'ow it is ther Second Mate didn't 'appen to spot it,' Quoin said, in a puzzled voice.

"It seemed to me that Plummer nudged him to be quiet. It looked as if Plummer shared the Second Mate's opinion, and the idea made me savage. But Stubbins's next remark drew my attention.

"'Why didn't you bloomin' well harsk him if he wern't doin' ther imaginin' trick when he sent us chasin' hup ther main, hafter that bogyman of his?'

"'I never thought of it,' I told him.

"'Well, yer ought ter have.'

"He paused, and sat up in his bunk, and asked for a match.

"As I passed him my box, Quoin looked up from his game.

"'It might 'ave been a stowaway, yer know. Yer carn't say as it's ever been proved as it wasn't.'

"Stubbins passed the box back to me, and went on without noticing Quoin's remark:

"'Told you to go an' have a snooze, did he? I don't hunderstand what he's bluffin' at.'

"'How do you mean, bluffing?' I asked.

"He nodded his head, sagely.

"'It's my hidea he knows you saw that light, just as bloomin' well as I do.'

"Plummer looked up from his game at this speech, but said nothing.

"'Then you don't doubt that I really saw it?' I asked, with a certain surprise.

"'Not me,' he remarked, with assurance. 'You hain't likely ter make that kind of mistake three times runnin'.'

"'No,' I said. 'I *know* I saw the light, right enough; but'—I hesitated a moment—'it's blessed queer.'

"'It *is* blessed queer!' he agreed. 'It's damned queer! An' there's a lot of other damn queer things happenin' aboard this packet lately.'

"He was silent for a few seconds. Then he spoke suddenly:

"'It's not nat'ral, I'm damned sure of that much.'

"HE TOOK a couple of draws at his pipe, and in the momentary silence, I caught Jaskett's voice, above us. He was hailing the poop.

"'Red light on the starboard quarter, Sir,' I heard him sing out.

"'There you are,' I said, with a jerk of my head. 'That's about where that packet ought to be by now. She couldn't cross our bows, so she up helm and let us pass, and now she's hauled up again and gone under our stern.'

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"I got up from the chest, and went to the door, the other three following. As we stepped out on deck, I heard the Second Mate shouting out, away aft, to know the whereabouts of the light.

"'By Jove! Stubbins,' I said. 'I believe the blessed thing's gone again.'

"We ran to the starboard side, in a body, and looked over; but there was no sign of a light in the darkness astern.

"'I carn't say as *I* see any light,' said Quoin.

"Plummer said nothing.

"I looked up at the fo'cas'le head. There, I could faintly distinguish the outlines of Jaskett. He was standing by the starboard rail, with his hands up, shading his eyes, evidently staring towards the place where he had last seen the light.

"'Where's she got to, Jaskett?' I called out.

"'I can't say, mate,' he answered. 'It's the most 'ellishly funny thing ever I've comed across. She were there as plain as me 'att one minnit, an' ther next she were gone—clean gone.'

"I turned to Plummer.

"'What do you think about it *now?*' I asked him.

"'Well,' he said. 'I'll admit I thought at first 'twere somethin' an' nothin'. I thought yer was mistaken; but it seems yer did see somethin'.'

"Away aft, we heard the sound of steps, along the deck.

"'Ther Second's comin' forrard for a hexplanation, Jaskett,' Stubbins sung out. 'You'd better go down an' change yer breeks.'

"The Second Mate passed us and went up the starboard ladder.

"What's up now, Jaskett?' he said quickly. 'Where is this light? Neither the 'prentice nor I can see it!'

"'Ther damn thing's clean gone, Sir,' Jaskett replied.

"'Gone!' the Second Mate said. 'Gone! What do you mean?'

"'She were there one minnit, Sir, as plain as me 'att, an' ther next,' she'd gone.'

"'You're an old fool, Jaskett,' the Second said, sharply. 'And that idiot Jessop has been putting things into your silly old head.'

"'We 'aven't—' Jaskett started to say; but the Second silenced him.

"'Stow it!' he said, and turned and went down the ladder, passing us quickly, without a word.

"'Doesn't look to *me,* Stubbins,' I said, 'as though the Second did believe we've seen the light.'

"'I hain't so sure,' he answered. 'He's a puzzler.'

"The rest of the watch passed away quietly; and at eight bells I made haste to turn in, for I was tremendously tired.

"When we were called again for the four to eight watch on deck, I learnt that one of the men in the Mate's watch had seen a light, soon after we had gone below, and had reported it, only for it to disappear immediately. This, I found, had happened twice, and the Mate had got so wild (being under the impression that the man was playing the fool) that he had nearly come to blows with him—finally ordering him off the look-out, and sending another man up in his place. If this last man saw the light, he took good care not to let the Mate know; so that the matter had ended there.

"And then, on the following night, before we had ceased to talk about the matter of the vanishing lights, something else occurred that temporarily drove from my mind all memory of the mist, and the extraordinary, blind atmosphere it had seemed to usher.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MAN WHO CRIED FOR HELP

"IT WAS, as I have said, on the following night that something further happened. And it brought home pretty vividly to me, if not to any of the others, the sense of a personal danger aboard.

"At a quarter to twelve, when we were called for our twelve to four watch on deck, I could tell at once, by the sound, that there was a fresh breeze blowing; at the same time, I heard the voices of the men in the other watch, singing out as they hauled on the ropes.

"Tom (who, as usual, had only turned out of his bunk at the last minute) came aft to answer his name. When, at last, he did come, the Second and the Mate joined in giving him a good dressing down for a lazy sojer; so that several minutes passed before we were on our way forrard again. This was a small enough matter in itself, and yet really terrible in its consequences to one of our number; for, just as we reached the fore rigging, there was a shout aloft, loud above the noise of the wind, and the next

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moment, something crashed down into our midst, with a great, slogging thud—something bulky and weighty, that struck full upon Jock, so that he went down with a loud, horrible, ringing 'ugg,' and never said a word. From the whole crowd of us there went up a yell of fear, and then, with one accord, there was a run for the lighted fo'cas'le. I am not ashamed to say that I ran with the rest. A blind, unreasoning fright had seized me, and I did not stop to think.

"Once in the fo'cas'le and the light, there was a reaction. We all stood and looked blankly at one another for a few moments. Then some one asked a question, and there was a general murmur of denial. We all felt ashamed, and some one reached up, and unhooked the lantern on the port side. I did the same with the starboard one; and there was a quick movement towards the doors. As we streamed out on deck, I caught the sound of the Mates' voices. They had evidently come down from off the poop to find out what had happened; but it was too dark to see their whereabouts.

"The Second Mate ran into the circle of light thrown by our lanterns, and stopped dead—eyeing us doubtfully.

"'There's been an awful accident, Sir. Something's fallen from aloft, right on to Jock—'

"I stopped suddenly; for there was a loud crying aloft.

"'Help! help! help!' some one was shouting, and then it rose from a shout into a scream.

"'My God, Sir!' I shouted. 'That's one of the men up at the fore royal!'

"'Listen!' ordered the Second Mate. 'Listen!'.

"Even as he spoke, it came again—broken and, as it were, in gasps.

"'Help! . . . Oh! . . . God! . . . Oh! . . . Help! H—e—l—p!'

"Abruptly, Stubbins's voice struck in.

"'Hup with us, lads! By God! hup with us!' and he made a spring into the fore rigging. I shoved the handle of the lantern between my teeth, and followed. Plummer was coming, but the Second Mate pulled him back.

"'That's sufficient,' he said. 'I'm going,' and he came up after me.

"We went over the foretop, racing like fiends. We cleared the crosstrees, and climbed into the t'gallant rigging. The wind was fairly fresh up there, and overhead, there sounded the flap, flap of sailcloth flying in the wind; but since we had left the deck, there had been no other sound from above.

"Now, abruptly, there came again a wild crying from the darkness over us. A strange, wild medley it was of screams for help, mixed up with violent, breathless curses.

"Beneath the royal yard, Stubbins halted, and looked down to me.

"'Hurry hup . . . with ther . . . lantern . . . Jessop!' he shouted, catching his breath between the words. 'There'll be . . . murder done . . . hin a minute!'

"I REACHED him, and held the light up for him to catch. He stooped, and took it from me. Then, holding it above his head, he went a few ratlines higher. In this manner, he reached to a level with the royal yard. From my position, a little below him, the lantern seemed but to throw a few straggling, flickering rays along the spar; yet they showed me something. My first glance had been to wind'ard, and I had seen at once, that there was nothing on the weather yard arm. From there my gaze went to leeward. Indistinctly, I saw something upon the yard, that clung, struggling. Stubbins bent towards it with the light; thus I saw it more clearly. It was Jacobs, the Ordinary Seaman. He had his right arm tightly round the yard; with the other, he appeared to be fending himself from something on the other side of him, and further out upon the yard. At times, moans and gasps came from him, and sometimes curses. Once, as he appeared to be dragged partly from his hold, he screamed like a woman.

"It seems impossible to convey truly to you, the strange scene on the royal yard. You may be able to picture it to yourselves. The Second Mate standing upon spar, holding the lantern; his body swaying with each roll of the ship, and his head craned forward as he peered along the yard. On our left, Jacobs, mad, fighting, cursing, praying, gasping; and outside of him, shadows and the night.

"The Second Mate spoke, abruptly.

"'Hold on a moment!' he said. Then:

"'Jacobs!' he shouted. 'Jacobs, do you hear me?'

"There was no reply, only the continual gasping and cursing.

"'Go on,' the Second Mate said to us. 'But be careful. Keep a tight hold!'

"He held the lantern higher, and we went out cautiously.

"Stubbins reached the Ordinary, and

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put his hand on his shoulder, with a soothing gesture.

"'Steady hon now, Jacobs,' he said. 'Steady hon.'

"At his touch, as though by magic, the young fellow calmed down, and Stubbins—reaching round him—grasped the jackstay on the other side.

"'Get a hold of him your side, Jessop,' he sung out. 'I'll get this side.'

"This I did, and Stubbins climbed round him.

"'There hain't no one here,' Stubbins called to me; but his voice expressed no surprise.

"'What!' sung out the Second Mate. 'No one there! Where's Svensen, then?'

"I did not catch Stubbins's reply; for suddenly, it seemed to me that I saw something shadowy at the extreme end of the yard, out by the lift. I stared. It rose up, upon the yard, and I saw that it was the figure of a man. It grasped at the lift, and commenced to swarm up, quickly. It passed diagonally above Stubbins's head, and reached down a vague hand and arm.

"'Look out! Stubbins!' I shouted. 'Look out!'

"'What's hup now?' he called, in a startled voice. At the same instant, his cap went whirling away to leeward.

"Then, all at once, Jacobs, who had only been giving an occasional moan, commenced to shriek and struggle.

"'Hold fast hon ter her!' Stubbins yelled. 'He'll be throwin' hisself hoff ther yard.'

I put my left arm round the Ordinary's body—getting hold of the jackstay on the other side.

"'Go along, young feller,' Stubbins put in. 'You're right now. We'll take care of you.' And we started to guide him along the yard.

"He went willingly enough; though without saying a word. He seemed like a child. Once or twice he shivered; but said nothing.

"We got him in to the lee rigging. Then, one going beside him, and the other keeping below, we made our way slowly down on deck. We got him into his bunk. We covered him up with his blankets, for he was pretty shivery. Then we came out. During the whole time, he had not spoken a word.

"WE REACHED the other men, and they opened out, and allowed us to get near the door. Several of them asked in low tones, whether Jacobs was all right, and I told them Yes, not saying anything then about his condition.

"I got close up to the doorway, and looked into the berth. The lamp was lit, and I could see plainly. There were two bunks in the place, and a man had been laid in each. The Skipper was there, leaning up against a bulkhead. He looked worried; but was silent—seeming to be mooding in his own thoughts. The Second Mate was busy with a couple of flags, which he was spreading over the bodies. The First Mate was talking, evidently telling him something; but his tone was so low that I caught his words only with difficulty. It struck me that he seemed pretty subdued. I got parts of his sentences in patches, as it were.

"'. . . broken,' I heard him say. 'And the Dutchman. . . .'

"'I've seen him,' the Second Mate said, shortly.

"'Two, straight off the reel,' said the Mate. '. . . three in. . . .'

"The Second made no reply.

"'Of course, yer know . . . accident.' The First Mate went on.

"'Is it!' the Second said, in a queer voice.

"I saw the Mate glance at him, in a doubtful sort of way; but the Second was covering poor old Jock's dead face, and did not appear to notice his look.

"'It—it . . .' the Mate said, and stopped.

"After a moment's hesitation, he said something further, that I could not catch; but there seemed a lot of funk in his voice.

"The Second Mate appeared not to have heard him; at any rate, he made no reply; but bent, and straightened out a corner of the flag over the rigid figure in the lower bunk. There was a certain niceness in his action which made me warm towards him.

"'He's white!' I thought to myself.

"Out loud, I said:

"'We've put Jacobs into his bunk, Sir.'

"The Mate jumped, then whizzed round, and stared at me as though I had been a ghost. The Second Mate turned also, but before he could speak, the Skipper took a step towards me.

"'Is he all right?' he asked.

"'Well, Sir,' I said. 'He's a bit queer; but I think it's possible he may be better after a sleep.'

"'I hope so, too,' he replied, and stepped out on deck. He went towards the starboard poop ladder, walking slow-

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ly. The Second went and stood by the lamp, and the Mate, after a quick glance at him, came out and followed the Skipper up on to the poop. It occurred to me then, like a flash, that the man had stumbled upon a portion of the *truth*.

"'Ah! Mr. Bully-Mate,' I thought to myself. 'You're in for a bad time if you've begun to understand.'

"Abruptly, my thoughts jumped to the vague future before us.

"'God help us!' I muttered.

"The Second Mate, after a look round, turned down the wick of the lamp, and came out, closing the door after him.

"'Now, you men,' he said to the Mate's watch, 'get forrard; we can't do anything more. You'd better go and get some sleep.'

"'i, i, Sir,' they said, in a chorus.

"Then, as we all turned to go forward, he asked if any one had relieved the lookout.

"'No, Sir,' answered Quoin.

"'Is it yours?' the Second asked.

"'Yes, Sir,' he replied.

"'Hurry up and relieve him then,' the Second said.

"As he spoke, several spots of rain fell, and I glanced up at the sky. It had become thickly clouded.

"The men in the other watch seemed to have no immediate intention of turning in, but sat in their bunks, and around on the chests. There was a general lighting of pipes, in the midst of which Stubbins jumped up from his sea-chest.

"'Ther Second Mate's whistlin'!' he said. 'Come hon,' and he ran out on deck.

"Plummer, Jaskett and I followed quickly. Outside, it had started to rain pretty heavily. As we went, the Second Mate's voice came to us through the darkness.

"'Stand by the main royal clewlines and buntlines,' I heard him shout, and the next instant came the hollow thutter of the sail as he started to lower away.

"In a few minutes we had hauled it up.

"'Up and furl it, a couple of you,' he sung out.

"I WENT towards the starboard rigging; then I hesitated. No one else had moved.

"The Second Mate came among us.

"'Come on now, lads,' he said. 'Make a move. It's got to be done.'

"Still, no one stirred.

"'I'll go,' I said, 'if some one else will come.'

"Tammy came across to me.

"'I'll come,' he volunteered, in a nervous voice.

"'No, by God, no!' said the Second Mate, abruptly. He jumped into the main rigging himself. 'Come along, Jessop!' he shouted.

"I followed him; but I was astonished. I had fully expected him to get on to the other fellows' tracks like a ton of bricks. It had not occurred to me that he was making allowances. I was simply puzzled then; but afterwards it dawned upon me.

"No sooner had I followed the Second Mate, than, straightway, Stubbins, Plummer, and Jaskett came up after us at a run.

"About halfway to the maintop, the Second Mate stopped, and looked down warily.

"'Who's that coming up below you, Jessop?' he asked.

"Before I could speak, Stubbins answered:

"'It's me, Sir, an' Plummer an' Jaskett.'

"'Who the devil told you to come *now*? Go straight down, the lot of you!'

"'We're comin' hup ter keep you company, Sir,' was his reply.

"At that, I was confident of a burst of temper from the Second; and yet, for the second time within a couple of minutes I was wrong. Instead of cursing Stubbins, he, after a moment's pause, went on up the rigging, without another word, and the rest of us followed. We reached the royal, and made short work of it; indeed, there were sufficient of us to have eaten it. When we had finished, I noticed that the Second Mate remained on the yard until we were all in the rigging. Evidently, he had determined to take a full share of any risk there might be; but I took care to keep pretty close to him; so as to be on hand if anything happened; yet we reached the deck again, without anything having occurred. I have said, without anything having occurred; but I am not really correct in this; for, as the Second Mate came down over the crosstrees, he gave a short, abrupt cry.

"'Anything wrong, Sir?' I asked.

"'No—o!' he said. 'Nothing! I banged my knee.'

"And yet *now*, I believe he was lying. For that same watch, I was to hear men

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giving just such cries; but, God knows, they had reason enough.

CHAPTER IX

HANDS THAT PLUCKED

"DIRECTLY we reached the deck, the Second Mate gave the order:

"'Mizzen t'gallant clewlines and buntlines,' and led the way up on to the poop. He went and stood by the halyards, ready to lower away. As I walked across to the starboard clewline I saw that the Old Man was on deck, and as I took hold of the rope, I heard him sing out to the Second Mate.

"'Call all hands to shorten sail, Mr. Tulipson.'

"'Very good, Sir,' the Second Mate replied. Then he raised his voice:

"'Go forrard, you, Jessop, and call all hands to shorten sail. You'd better give them a call in the bosun's place, as you go.'

"'i,i, Sir,' I sung out, and hurried off.

"As I went, I heard him tell Tammy to go down and call the Mate.

"Reaching the fo'cas'le, I put my head in through the starboard doorway, and found some of the men beginning to turn in.

"'It's all hands on deck, shorten sail,' I sung out.

"I stepped inside.

"'Just wot I said,' grumbled one of the men.

"'They don't dam well think we're goin' aloft to-night, after what's happened?' asked another.

"'Well,' I replied, 'we've got to get the sail off her, or there'll be a mess. The glass is falling.'

"'Come erlong, boys. We've got ter du it,' said one of the older men, rising from the chest, at this point. 'What's it duin' outside, mate?'

"'Raining,' I said. 'You'll want your oil-skins.'

"I stepped out on deck, and ran aft again to give them a hand with the sail. We got it hauled up, and then went forward to the fore t'gallant. And, a minute later, the other watch were out, and, with the Mate, were busy at the main.

"By the time the main was ready for making fast, we had the fore hauled up, so that now all three t'gallants were in the ropes, and ready for stowing. Then came the order:

"I was going swiftly down into the darkness!"

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"'Up aloft and furl!'

"'Up with you, lads,' the Second Mate said. 'Don't let's have any hanging back this time.'

"Away aft by the main, the men in the Mate's watch seemed to be standing in a clump by the mast; but it was too dark to see clearly. I heard the Mate start to curse; then there came a growl and he shut up.

"'Be handy, men! be handy!' the Second Mate sung out.

"At that, Stubbins jumped into the rigging.

"'Come hon!' he shouted. 'We'll have ther bloomin' sail fast, an' down hon the deck again before they're started.'

"Plummer followed; then Jaskett, I, and Quoin who had been called down off the look-out to give a hand.

"'That's the style, lads!' the Second sung out, encouragingly. Then he ran aft to the Mate's crowd. I heard him and the Mate talking to the men, and presently, when we were going over the foretop, I made out that they were beginning to get into the rigging.

"I found out, afterwards, that as soon as the Second Mate had seen them off the deck, he went up to the mizzen t'gallant, along with the four 'prentices.

"On our part, we made our way slowly aloft, keeping one hand for ourselves and the other for the ship, as you can fancy. In this manner we had gone as far as the crosstrees, at least, Stubbins, who was first, had; when, all at once, he gave out just another such cry as had the Second Mate a little earlier, only that in his case he followed it by turning round and blasting Plummer.

"'You might have blarsted well sent me flyin' down hon deck,' he shouted. 'If you think it's a joke, try it hon some one else. . . .'

"'It wasn't me!' interrupted Plummer. 'I 'aven't touched yer. 'oo the 'ell are yer swearin' at?'

"'At you. . . !' I heard him reply; but what more he may have said, was lost in a loud shout from Plummer.

"'What's up, Plummer?' I sung out. 'For God's sake, you two, don't get fighting, up aloft!'

"Yet he only cried out the more. And then, abruptly, I caught the sound of a frightened clamour of men's voices, away down somewhere about the maintop—curses, cries of fear, even shrieks, and above it all, some one shouting to go down on deck:

"'Get down! get down! down; down! Blarst—'

"The rest was drowned in a fresh outburst of hoarse crying in the night.

"I TRIED to get past old Jaskett; but he was clinging to the rigging, sprawled on to it, is the best way to describe his attitude, so much of it as I could see in the darkness. Up above him, Stubbins and Plummer still shouted and cursed, and the shrouds quivered and shook, as though the two were fighting desperately.

"Stubbins seemed to be shouting something definite; but whatever it was, I could not catch.

"At my helplessness, I grew angry, and shook and prodded Jaskett, to make him move.

"'Damn you, Jaskett!' I roared. 'Damn you for a funky old fool! Let me get past! Let me get past, will you!'

"In the same instant a sentence from Stubbins floated down to me, with a strange distinctness:

"*'For God's sake tell 'em ter get down hon deck!'* he was shouting.

"Even as the words came to me, something in the darkness gripped my waist. I made a desperate clutch at the rigging with my disengaged hand, and it was well for me that I secured the hold so quickly; for the same instant, I was wrenched at with a brutal ferocity that appalled me. I said nothing, but lashed out into the night with my left foot. It is queer, but I cannot say with certainty that I struck anything; I was too downright desperate with funk, to be sure; and yet it seemed to me that my foot encountered something soft, that gave under the blow. It must have been nothing more than an imagined sensation, yet I am inclined to think otherwise; for, instantly, the hold about my waist was released; and I commenced to scramble down, clutching the shrouds pretty desperately.

"I have only a very uncertain remembrance of that which followed. Whether I slid over Jaskett, or whether he gave way to me, I cannot tell. I know only that I reached the deck, in a blind whirl of fear and excitement, and the next thing I remember, I was among a crowd of shouting, half-mad sailor-men.

"In a confused way, I was conscious that the Skipper and the Mates were down among us, trying to get us into some state of calmness. Eventually they

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succeeded, and we were told to go aft to the Saloon door, which we did in a body. Here, the Skipper himself served out a large tot of rum to each of us. Then, at his orders, the Second Mate called the roll.

"He called over the Mate's watch first, and every one answered. Then he came to ours, and he must have been much agitated; for the first name he sung out was Jock's.

"Among us there came a moment of dead silence, and I noticed the wail and moan of the wind aloft, and the flap, flap of the three unfurled t'gallan'sls.

"The Second Mate called the next name, hurriedly:

"'Jaskett,' he sung out.

"'Sir,' Jaskett answered.

"'Quoin.'

"'Yes, Sir.'

"'Jessop.'

"'Sir,' I replied.

"'Stubbins.'

"There was no answer.

"'Stubbins,' again called the Second Mate.

"Again there was no reply.

"'Is Stubbins here?—any one!' The Second's voice sounded sharp and anxious.

"There was a moment's pause. Then one of the men spoke:

"'He's not here, Sir.'

"He was standing a few ratlines up the t'gallant rigging, and he bent his body outwards to get a better look.

"I was just at the Old Man's heels.

"Suddenly, he shouted out:

"'There he is! . . . Stubbins! Stubbins!'

"'Where, Sir?' asked the Second, eagerly. 'I can't see him!'

"'There! there!' replied the Skipper, pointing.

"I LOOKED up in the direction his finger indicated. At first, I could see nothing; then, slowly, you know, there grew upon my sight a dim figure crouching upon the bunt of the royal, and partly hidden by the mast. I stared, and gradually it came to me that there was a couple of them, and further out upon the yard, a hump that might have been anything, and was only visible indistinctly amid the flutter of the canvas.

"'Stubbins!' the Skipper sung out. 'Stubbins, come down out of that! Do you hear me?'

"But no one came, and there was no answer.

"'There's two. . . .' I began; but he was shouting again:

"'Come down out of that! Do you damned well hear me?'

"Still there was no reply.

"'I'm hanged if I can see him at all, Sir!' the Second Mate called out.

"'Can't see him!' said the Old Man, now thoroughly angry. 'I'll soon let you see him!'

"He pulled off the cap of the light.

"'There's two of them, Sir,' I called again to him.

"'What?' he said in a loud voice, and at the same instant he rubbed the end of the light across the cap, and it burst into fire.

"He held it up so that it lit the royal yard like day, and straightway, a couple of shapes dropped silently from the royal on to the t'gallant yard. At the same moment, the humped something, midway out upon the yard, rose up. It ran in to the mast, and I lost sight of it.

"'God!' I heard the skipper gasp, and he fumbled in his side pocket.

"I saw the two figures which had dropped on to the t'gallant, run swiftly along the yard—one to the starboard and the other to the port yard arms.

"The Second Mate's pistol cracked out twice, sharply. Then, from over my head the Skipper fired twice, and then again; but with what effect, I could not tell. Abruptly, as he fired his last shot, I was aware of an indistinct Something, gliding down full upon Plummer.

"'Look out above you, Plummer!' I almost shrieked.

"'What? where?' he called, and waved his flare, excitedly.

"Pistol in hand, the Skipper was glancing about, uneasily.

"'Hold up that light, Jessop,' he said. 'I can't see!'

"All at once, there rose a loud outcry on deck, and then came the sound of a man screaming.

"'Get out of my way, Jessop!' the Skipper roared.

"I had caught a momentary glimpse of a man running from the doorway on the port side of the fo'cas'le. In less than half a minute we were upon the deck, and among a crowd of the men who were grouped round something. Yet, strangely enough, they were not looking at the thing among them; but away aft at something in the darkness.

"'It's on the rail!' cried several voices.

"'Overboard!' called somebody, in an

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excited voice. 'It's jumped over the side!'

"'There wer'nt nothin'!' said a man in the crowd.

"'Silence!' shouted the Old Man. 'Where's the Mate? What's happened?'

"'Here, Sir,' called the First Mate, shakily, from near the centre of the group. 'It's Jacobs, Sir. He—he. . . .'

"'What!' said the Skipper. 'What!'

"'He—he's—he's dead—I think!' said the First Mate, in jerks.

"'Let me see,' said the Old Man, in a quieter tone.

"The men had stood to one side to give him room, and he knelt beside the man upon the deck.

"'Pass the lantern here, Jessop,' he said.

"I stood by him, and held the light. The man was lying face downwards on the deck. Under the light from the lantern, the Skipper turned him over and looked at him.

"'Yes,' he said, after a short examination. 'He's dead.'

"He stood up and regarded the body a moment, in silence. Then he turned to the Second Mate, who had been standing by, during the last couple of minutes.

"'Three!' he said, in a grim undertone.

"The Second Mate nodded.

"He seemed on the point of saying something; then he turned and looked at Jacobs, and said nothing.

"'Three,' repeated the Old Man. 'Since eight bells!'

"He stooped and looked again at Jacobs.

"'Poor devil! poor devil!' he muttered.

"The Second Mate grunted some of the huskiness out of his throat, and spoke.

"'Where must we take him?' he asked, quietly. 'The two bunks are full.'

"'You'll have to put him down on the deck, by the lower bunk,' replied the Skipper.

"As they carried him away, I heard the Old Man make a sound that was almost a groan.

"'My God! O, my God!' he muttered, and began to walk slowly aft.

CHAPTER X

THE COUNCIL

"A FEW minutes later, the Second Mate came forrard again. I was still standing near the rigging, holding the lantern, in an aimless sort of way.

"'That you, Plummer?' he asked.

"'No, Sir,' I said. 'It's Jessop.'

"'Where's Plummer, then?' he inquired testily.

"'I don't know, Sir,' I answered. 'I expect he's gone forrard. Shall I go and tell him you want him?'

"'No, there's no need,' he said. 'Tie your lamp up in the rigging—on the sherpole there.'

"'Then go and get his, and shove it up on the starboard side. After that you'd better go aft and give the two 'prentices a hand in the lamp locker.'

"'i, i, Sir,' I replied, and proceeded to do as he directed. After I had got the light from Plummer, and lashed it up to the starboard sherpole, I hurried aft. I found Tammy and the other 'prentice in our watch, busy in the locker, lighting lamps.

"'What are we doing?' I asked. I was pretty jumpy.

"'The Old Man's given orders to lash all the spare lamps we can find, in the rigging, so as to have the decks light,' said Tammy. 'And a damned good job, too!'

"He handed me a couple of the lamps, and took two himself.

"'Come on,' he said, and stepped out on deck. 'We'll fix these in the main rigging, and then I want to talk to you.'

"We shoved the lamps up on the sherpoles—two on each side. Then he came across to me.

"'Look here, Jessop!' he said, without any hesitation. 'You'll have to jolly well tell the Skipper and the Second Mate all you know about all this.'

"'What could they do, anyway?' I said, despondently. 'As things are going, we'll all be dead before another week is over, at this rate.'

"'You've forgotten, Tammy,' I said, 'Even if I could get the Old Man to believe I'd got at the truth of the matter, he couldn't do anything. Don't you see, if I'm right, we couldn't even see the land, if we made it. We're like blind men. . . .'

"'What on earth do you mean?' he interrupted. 'How do you make out we're like blind men? Of course we could see the land. . . .'

"'Wait a minute! wait a minute!' I said. 'You don't understand. Didn't I tell you?'

"'Tell what?' he asked.

"'About the ship I spotted,' I said. 'I thought you knew!'

"And then I told him the whole truth

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of the affair. After I had done that, I explained my idea about it, to him.

"He stopped in his walk, and looked round.

"'Wait a minute,' he said, and ran aft a few steps.

I saw him look up at the break of the poop; then he came back.

"'Come along now,' he said. 'The Old Man's up on the poop, talking to the Second Mate. You'll never get a better chance.'

"I WENT up the ladder, and walked across to where the Skipper and the Second Mate stood talking earnestly, by the rail. The Second Mate asked what I wanted.

"'I want to speak to you and the Old M—Captain, Sir,' I answered.

"The Skipper had turned to the Second Mate. Then the Old Man turned to me again.

"'Look here, Jessop,' he said. 'I'm going to talk straight to you. You strike me as being a cut above the ordinary shellback, and I think you've sense enough to hold your tongue.'

"'I've got my mate's ticket, Sir,' I said.

"The Skipper nodded.

"'You've seen things come out of the sea you say?' he questioned. 'Now just tell me all you can remember, from the very beginning.'

"I stuck well to solid facts; and now and then he and the Second Mate would look at one another, and nod.

"Now that I knew he was willing to listen to me in a serious manner, all my funk of telling him had gone, and I went ahead and told him my ideas about the mist, and the thing it seemed to have ushered, you know.

I finished up, by telling him how Tammy had worried me to come and tell what I knew.

"'He thought then, Sir,' I went on, 'that you might wish to put into the nearest port; but I told him that I didn't think you could, even if you wanted to.'

"'How's that?' he asked, profoundly interested.

"'Well, Sir,' I replied. 'If we're unable to see other vessels, we shouldn't be able to see the land. You'd be piling the ship up, without ever seeing where you were putting her.'

"This view of the matter affected the

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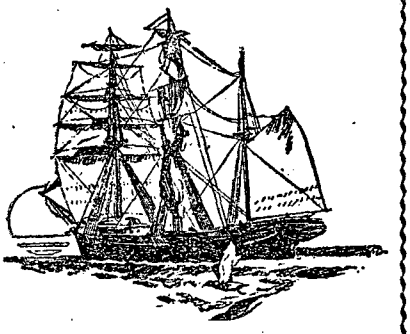
"Night came down slowly, but the sea was still boiling. I was alone on deck when sheer nightmare leapt from the sea.

"A huge chunk of black rock—the size of the Baptist Church down the street—shot from the heaving oil about a hundred yards away, plummetted over us in a crazy curve, and set up a splash of black muck as it dived that nearly swamped us.

"The mate and I are the only human witnesses of what seethed up through the crawling oil. All the three hundred foot nightmares of our dragon-ridden fairy-tale days boiled lazily up in that infernal black stew. Lizards as big as small trains with grinning mouths jammed full of six-inch teeth rolled over and over in the swashing oil, huge armor plated,



four-legged brutes the size of locomotives twirled round and round belly up in the twilight. Some of them had been split wide open, and their insides, black with oil, steamed and smoked like slaughter houses. Smaller beasts in thousands, and a thick scum of broken insects, littered the crawling oil between the slowly plunging carcasses of the big fellows."

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Old Man in an extraordinary manner; as it did, I believe, the Second Mate. And neither spoke for a moment. Then the Skipper burst out.

"'By Gad! Jessop,' he said. 'If you're right, the Lord have mercy on us.'

"He thought for a couple of seconds. Then he spoke again, and I could see that he was pretty well twisted up:

"'My God! . . . if you're right!'

"THE Second Mate spoke.

"'The men mustn't know, Sir,' he warned him. 'It'd be a mess if they did!'

"'Yes,' said the Old Man.

"He spoke to me.

"'Remember that, Jessop,' he said. 'Whatever you do, don't go yarning about this forrard.'

"'No, Sir,' I replied.

"'And you too, boy,' said the Skipper. 'Keep your tongue between your teeth. We're in a bad enough mess, without your making it worse. Do you hear?'

"'Yes, Sir,' answered Tammy.

"The Old Man turned to me again.

"'These things, or creatures that you say come out of the sea,' he said. 'You've never seen them, except after nightfall?' he asked.

"'No, Sir,' I replied. 'Never.'

"He turned to the Second Mate.

"'So far as I can make out, Mr. Tulipson,' he remarked, 'the danger seems to be only at night.'

"'It's always been at night, Sir,' the Second answered.

"The Old Man nodded.

"'Have you anything to propose, Mr. Tulipson?' he asked.

"'Well, Sir,' replied the Second Mate. 'I think you ought to have her snugged down every night, before dark!'

"He spoke with considerable emphasis. Then he glanced aloft, and jerked his head in the direction of the unfurled t'gallants.

"'It's a damned good thing, Sir,' he said, 'that it didn't come on to blow any harder.'

"The Old Man nodded again.

"'Yes,' he remarked. 'We shall have to do it; but God knows when we'll get home!'

"'Better late than not at all,' I heard the Second mutter, under his breath.

"Out loud, he said:

"'And the lights, Sir?'

"'Yes,' said the Old Man. 'I will have lamps in the rigging every night, after dark.'

"'Very good, Sir,' assented the Second. Then he turned to us.

"'It's getting daylight, Jessop,' he remarked, with a glance at the sky. 'You'd better take Tammy with you, and shove those lamps back again into the locker.'

"'i, i, Sir,' I said, and went down off the poop with Tammy.

CHAPTER XI

THE SHADOW IN THE SEA

"WHEN eight bells went, at four o'clock, and the other watch came on deck to relieve us, it had been broad daylight for some time. Before we went below, the Second Mate had the three t'gallants set; and now that it was light, we were pretty curious to have a look aloft, especially up the fore; and Tom, who had been up to overhaul the gear, was questioned a lot, when he came down, as to whether there were any signs of anything queer up there. But he told us there was nothing unusual to be seen.

"At eight o'clock, when we came on deck for the eight to twelve watch, I saw the Sailmaker coming forrard along the deck, from the Second Mate's old berth. He had his rule in his hand, and I knew he had been measuring the poor beggars in there for their burial outfit. From breakfast time until near noon, he worked, shaping out three canvas wrappers from some old sail-cloth. Then, with the aid of the Second Mate and one of the hands, he brought out the three dead chaps on to the after hatch, and there sewed them up, with a few lumps of holy stone at their feet. He was just finishing, when eight bells went, and I heard the Old Man tell the Second Mate to call all hands aft for the burial. This was done, and one of the gangways unshipped.

"We had no decent grating big enough, so they had to get off one of the hatches, and use it instead. The wind had died away during the morning, and the sea was almost a calm—the ship lifting ever so slightly to an occasional glassy heave. The only sounds that struck on the ear were the soft, slow rustle and occasional shiver of the sails, and the continuous and monotonous creak, creak of the spars and gear at the gentle movement of the vessel. And it was in this solemn half-quietness that the Skipper read the burial service.

"They had put the Dutchman first

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upon the hatch (I could tell him by his stumpiness), and when at last the Old Man gave the signal, the Second Mate tilted his end, and he slid off, and down into the dark.

"'Poor old Dutchie,' I heard one of the men say, and I fancy we all felt a bit like that.

"Then they lifted Jacobs on to the hatch, and when he had gone, Jock. When Jock was lifted, a sort of sudden shiver ran through the crowd. He had been a favourite in a quiet way, and I know I felt, all at once, just a bit queer. I was standing by the rail, upon the after bollard, and Tammy was next to me; while Plummer stood a little behind. As the Second Mate tilted the hatch for the last time, a little, hoarse chorus broke from the men:—

"'S'long, Jock! So long, Jock!'

"And then, at the sudden plunge, they rushed to the side to see the last of him as he went downwards. Even the Second Mate was not able to resist this universal feeling, and he, too, peered over. From where I had been standing, I had been able to see the body take the water, and now, for a brief couple of seconds, I saw the white of the canvas, blurred by the blue of the water, dwindle and dwindle in the extreme depth. Abruptly, as I stared, it disappeared—too abruptly, it seemed to me.

"'GONE!' I heard several voices say, and then our watch began to go slowly forrard, while one of two of the other, started to replace the hatch.

"Tammy pointed, and nudged me.

"'See, Jessop,' he said. 'What is it?'

"'What?' I asked.

"'That queer shadow,' he replied. 'Look!'

"And then I saw what he meant. It was something big and shadowy, that appeared to be growing clear. It occupied the exact place—so it seemed to me—in which Jock had disappeared.

"'Look at it!' said Tammy, again. 'It's getting bigger!'

"He was pretty excited, and so was I.

"I was peering down. The thing seemed to be rising out of the depths. It was taking shape. As I realised what the shape was, a queer, cold funk took me.

"'See,' said Tammy. 'It's just like the shadow of a ship!'

"And it was. The shadow of a ship rising out of the unexplored immensity beneath our keel.

"A little way from me, the Second Mate was staring down into the water. I turned, and spoke to him.

"'What do you make it out to be, Sir?' I asked.

"'God knows!' he said, with a quick glance round to see whether any of the men were about.

"He got down from the rail, and turned to go up on to the poop. At the top of the ladder, he leant over the break.

"'You may as well ship that gangway, you two,' he told us. 'And mind, Jessop, keep your mouth shut about this.'

"'i, i, Sir,' I answered.

"As I stowed away my grub, I took no notice of the chatter of the others. I was too stuffed with my own thoughts. That shadow of a vessel rising, you know, out of the profound deeps, had impressed me tremendously. It had not been imagination. Three of us had seen it—really four; for Plummer distinctly saw it; though he failed to recognise it as anything extraordinary.

"As you can understand, I thought a lot about this shadow of a vessel. But, I am sure, for a time, my ideas must just have gone in an everlasting, blind circle. And then I got another thought; for I got thinking of the figures I had seen aloft in the early morning; and I began to imagine fresh things. You see, that first thing that had come up over the side, had come *out of the sea*. And it had gone back. And now there was this shadow vessel-thing—ghost-ship I called it. It was a damned good name, too. And the dark, noiseless men. . . . I thought a lot on these lines. Unconsciously, I put a question to myself, aloud:—

"'Were they the crew?'

"'Eh?' said Jeskett, who was on the next chest.

"I took hold of myself, as it were, and glanced at him, in an apparently careless manner.

"'Did I speak?' I asked.

"'Yes, mate,' he replied, eyeing me, curiously.

"'I must have been dreaming,' I said; and rose up to put away my plate.

CHAPTER XII

THE GHOST SHIPS

"AT four o'clock, when again we went on deck, the Second Mate told me to go on with a paunch mat I was making; while Tammy, he sent

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to get out his sinnet. I had the mat slung on the fore side of the mainmast, between it and the after end of the house; and, in a few minutes, Tammy brought his sinnet and yarns to the mast, and made fast to one of the pins.

"'What do you think it was, Jessop?' he asked, abruptly, after a short silence.

"I looked up at him.

"'What do you think?' I replied.

"'I don't know what to think,' he said. 'But I've a feeling that it's something to do with all the rest,' and he indicated aloft, with his head.

"'I've been thinking, too,' I remarked.

"'That it is?' he inquired.

"'Yes,' I answered, and told him how the idea had come to me at my dinner, that the strange men-shadows which came aboard, might come from that indistinct vessel we had seen down in the sea.

"'Good Lord!' he exclaimed, as he got my meaning.

"And then for a little, he stood and thought.

"'That's where they live, you mean?' he said, at last, and paused again.

"'Well,' I replied. 'It can't be the sort of existence *we* should call life.'

"He nodded, doubtfully.

"'No,' he said, and was silent again.

"Presently, he put out an idea that had come to him.

"'You *think*, then, that that—vessel has been with us for some time, if we'd only known?' he asked.

"'All along,' I replied. 'I mean ever since these things started.'

"'Supposing there are others,' he said, suddenly.

"I looked at him.

"'If there are,' I said. 'You can pray to God that they won't stumble across us. It strikes me that whether they're ghosts or not ghosts, they're blood-gutted pirates.'

"'It seems horrible,' he said, solemnly, 'to be talking seriously like this, about—you know, about such things.'

"'I've tried to stop thinking that way,' I told him. 'I've felt I should go cracked if I didn't. There's damned queer things happen at sea, I know; but this isn't one of them.'

"'It seems so strange and unreal, one moment, doesn't it?' he said. 'And the next, you *know* it's really true, and you can't understand why you didn't always know. And yet they'd never believe, if you told them ashore about it.'

"'They'd believe, if they'd been in this packet in the middle watch this morning,' I said.

"'Besides,' I went on. 'They don't understand. We didn't. . . . I shall always feel different now, when I read that some packet hasn't been heard of.'

"Tammy stared at me. His face was dead white.

"'I've heard some of the old shellbacks talking about things,' he said. 'But I never took them really seriously.'

"'Well,' I said. 'I guess we'll have to take this seriously. I wish to God we were home!'

"'My God! so do I,' he said.

"For a good while after that, we both worked on in silence; but, presently, he went off on another tack.

"'Do you really think we'll shorten her down every night before it gets dark?' he asked.

"'Certainly,' I replied. 'They'll never get the men to go aloft at night, after what's happened.'

"'But, but—supposing they *ordered* us aloft—' he began.

"'Would you go?' I interrupted.

"'No!' he said, emphatically. 'I'd jolly well be put in irons first!'

"'That settles it, then,' I replied. 'You wouldn't go, nor would any one else.'

"At this moment the Second Mate came along.

"'Shove that mat and that sinnet away, you two,' he said. 'Then get your brooms and clear up.'

"'I, i, Sir,' we said, and he went on forrard.

"'Jump on the house, Tammy,' I said. 'And let go the other end of this rope, will you?'

"'Right,' he said, and did as I had asked him.

When he came back, I got him to give me a hand to roll up the mat, which was a very large one.

"'I'll finish stopping it,' I said, 'You go and put your sinnet away.'

"'Wait a minute,' he replied, and gathered up a double handful of shakins from the deck, under where I had been working.

Then he ran to the side.

"'Here!' I said. 'Don't go dumping those. They'll only float, and the Second Mate or the Skipper will be sure to spot them.'

"'Come here, Jessop!' he interrupted, in a low voice, and taking no notice of what I had been saying.

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"I GOT up off the hatch, where I was kneeling. He was staring over the side.

"'What's up?' I asked.

"'For God's sake, hurry!' he said, and I ran, and jumped on to the spar, alongside of him.

"'Look!' he said, and pointed with a handful of shakins, right down, directly beneath us.

"Some of the shakins dropped from his hand, and blurred the water, momentarily, so that I could not see. Then, as the ripples cleared away, I saw what he meant.

"'Two of them!' he said, in a voice that was scarcely above a whisper. 'And there's another out there,' and he pointed again with a handful of shakins.

"'There's another a little further aft,' I muttered.

"'Where?—where?' he asked.

"'There,' I said, and pointed.

"'That's four,' he whispered. 'Four of them!'

"I said nothing; but continued to stare. They appeared to me to be a great way down in the sea, and quite motionless. Yet, though their outlines were somewhat blurred and indistinct, there was no mistaking that they were very like exact, though shadowy, representations of vessels.

"For some minutes, we watched them, without speaking.

"Away forrard, I hear the Second Mate returning aft.

"'What's up now, you two?' he called, sharply. 'This isn't clearing up!'

"I put out my hand to warn him not to shout, and draw the attention of the men.

"He took several steps towards me.

"'What is it? what is it?' he said, in a lower voice.

"'You'd better take a look over the side, Sir,' I replied.

"My tone must have given him an inkling that we had discovered something fresh; for, at my words, he made one spring, and stood on the spar, alongside of me.

"'Look, Sir,' said Tammy. 'There's four of them.'

"The Second Mate bent forward.

"'My God!' I heard him mutter, under his breath.

"After that, for some half-minute, he stared, without a word.

"IT was while we were up at the foresail, that the sun went over the edge of the horizon. We had finished stowing the sail, out upon the yard, and I was waiting for the others to clear in, and let me get off the foot-rope. Thus it happened that having nothing to do for nearly a minute. I stood watching the sun set, and so saw something that otherwise I should, most probably, have missed. The sun had dipped nearly half-way below the horizon, and was showing like a great, red dome of dull fire. Abruptly, far away on the starboard bow, a faint mist drove up out of the sea. It spread across the face of the sun, so that its light shone now as though it came through a dim haze of smoke. Quickly, this mist or haze grew thicker; but, at the same time, separating and taking strange shapes, so that the red of the sun struck through ruddily between them. Then, as I watched, the weird mistiness collected and shaped and rose into three towers. These became more definite, and there was something elongated beneath them. The shaping and forming continued, and almost suddenly I saw that the thing had taken on the shape of a great ship. It had been broadside on to the sun. Now it was swinging. The bows came round with a stately movement, until the three masts bore in a line. It was heading directly towards us. It grew larger; but yet less distinct. Astern of it, I saw now that the sun had sunk to a mere line of light. Then, in the gathering dusk it seemed to me that the ship was sinking back into the ocean. The sun went beneath the sea, and the thing I had seen, became merged, as it were, into night.

"A voice came to me from the rigging.

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It was the Second Mate's. He had been up to give us a hand.

"'Now then, Jessop,' he was saying. 'Come along! Get up on the poop.'

"I turned quickly, and realised that the fellows were nearly all off the yard.

"'You—' the Second Mate turned to me. 'Take the wheel.'

"'i, i, Sir,' I muttered, and slid along the foot-rope. I felt fresh dazed and frightened.

"A minute of some confusion followed; and then came the click of pawls. I could tell that they had taken the haul-yards to the after capstan. Odd words floated up to me.

"'. . . . all this water?' I heard in the Old Man's voice. He appeared to be asking a question.

"'Can't say, Sir,' came the Second Mate's.

"There was a period of time, filled only by the clicking of the pawls and the sounds of the creaking parrel and the running gear. Then the Second Mate's voice came again.

"'Seems all right, Sir,' I heard him say.

"I never heard the Old Man's reply; for in the same moment, there came to me a chill of cold breath at my back. I turned sharply, and saw something peering over the taffrail. It had eyes that reflected the binnacle light, weirdly, with a frightful, tigerish gleam; but beyond that, I could see nothing with any distinctness. For the moment, I just stared. I seemed frozen. It was so close. Then movement came to me, and I jumped to the binnacle and snatched out the lamp. I twitched round, and shone the light towards it. The thing, whatever it was, had come more forward over the rail; but now, before the light, it recoiled with a queer, horrible litheness. It slid back, and down, and so out of sight. I have only a confused notion of a wet, glistening something, and two vile eyes. Then I was running, crazy, towards the break of the poop. I sprang down the ladder, and missed my footing, and landed on my stern, at the bottom.

CHAPTER XIII

THE GREAT GHOST SHIP

"WHEN we were called at a quarter to four, the man who roused us out, had some queer information.

"'Toppin's gone—clean vanished!' he told us, as we began to turn out. 'I never was in such a damned, hair-raisin' hooker as this here. It ain't safe to go about the bloomin' decks.'

"''oo's gone?' asked Plummer, sitting up suddenly and throwing his legs over his bunk-board.

"'Toppin, one of the 'prentices,' replied the man. 'We've been huntin' all over the bloomin' show. We're still at it. . . . But they'll never find him,' he ended, with a sort of gloomy assurance.

"'Oh, I dunno,' said Quoin. 'P'raps 'e's snoozin' somewheres 'bout.'

"'Not him,' replied the man. 'I tell you we've turned everythin' upside down. He's not aboard the bloomin' ship.'

"'Where was he when they last saw him?' I asked. 'Some one must know something, you know!'

"'Keepin' time up on the poop,' he replied. 'The Old Man's nearly shook the life out of the Mate and the chap at the wheel. And they say they don't know nothin'.'

"'How do you mean?' I inquired. 'How do you mean, nothing?'

"'Well,' he answered. 'The youngster was there one minute, and then the next thing they knew, he'd gone. They've both sworn black an' blue that there wasn't a whisper. He's just disappeared off of the face of the bloomin' earth.'

"I got down on to my chest, and reached for my boots.

"Before I could speak again, the man was saying something fresh.

"'See here, mates,' he went on. 'If things is goin' on like this, I'd like to know where you an' me'll be befor' long!'

"'We'll be in 'ell,' said Plummer harshly.

"'I dunno as I like to think about it,' said Quoin.

"'We'll have to think about it!' replied the man. 'We've got to think a bloomin' lot about it. I've talked to our side, an' they're game.'

"'Game for what?' I asked.

"'To go an' talk straight to the bloomin' Capting,' he said, wagging his finger at me. 'It's make tracks for the nearest bloomin' port, an' don't you make no bloomin' mistake.'

"I opened my mouth to tell him that the probability was we should not be able to make it, even if he could get the Old Man to see the matter from his point of view. Then I remembered that the chap had no idea of the things I had

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seen, and *thought out*; so, instead, I said:

"'Supposing he won't?'

"'Then we'll have to bloomin' well make him,' he replied.

"'And when you got there,' I said. 'What then? You'd be jolly well locked up for mutiny.'

"'I'd sooner be locked up,' he said. 'It don't kill you!'

"There was a murmur of agreement from the others, and then a moment of silence, in which, I know, the men were thinking.

"Jaskett's voice broke into it.

"'I never thought at first as she was aunted—' he commenced; but Plummer cut in across his speech.

"'We mustn't 'urt any one, yer know,' he said. 'That'd mean 'angin', an' they ain't been er bad crowd.

"'No,' assented every one, including the chap who had come to call us.

"'All the same,' he added. 'It's got to be up hellum, an' shove her into the nearest bloomin' port.'

"'Yes,' said every one, and then eight bells went, and we cleared out on deck.

"PRESENTLY, after roll-call — in which there had come a queer, awkward little pause at Toppin's name—Tammy came over to me.

"I was leaning over the port rail, by the fore brace-block, staring down into the sea, when Tammy came. For perhaps a minute he said nothing. When at last he spoke, it was to say that the shadow vessels had not been there since daylight.

"'What?' I said, in some surprise. 'How do you know?'

"'I woke up when they were search for Toppin,' he replied. 'I've not been asleep since. I came here, right away.' He began to say something further; but stopped short.

"'Yes,' I said encouragingly.

"'I don't know . . .' he began, and broke off. He caught my arm. 'Oh, Jessop!' he exclaimed. 'What's going to be the end of it all? Surely something can be done?'

"I said nothing. I had a desperate feeling that there was very little we could do to help ourselves.

"'Can't we do something?' he asked, and shook my arm. 'Anything's better than *this!* We're being *murdered!*'

"Still, I said nothing; but stared moodily down into the water. I could plan nothing; though I would get mad, feverish fits of thinking.

"'Do you hear?' he said. He was almost crying.

"'Yes, Tammy,' I replied. 'But I don't know! I *don't* know!'

"'You don't know!' he exclaimed. 'You don't know! Do you mean we're just to give in, and be murdered, one after another?'

"'We've done all we can,' I replied. 'I don't know what else we can do, unless we go below and lock ourselves in, every night.'

"'That would be better than this,' he said. 'There'll be no one to go below, or anything else, soon!'

"'But what if it came on to blow?' I asked. 'We'd be having the sticks blown out of her.'

"'What if it came on to blow *now*?' he returned. 'No one would go aloft, if it were dark, you said, yourself! Besides, we could shorten her *right* down, first. I tell you, in a few days there won't be a chap alive aboard this packet, unless they jolly well do something!'

"'Don't shout,' I warned him. 'You'll have the Old Man hearing you.'

"He started on a fresh tack. He was almost out of his mind.

"'Why don't the men do something?' he began. 'They ought to damn well make the Old Man put us into port! They ought. . . .'

"'For goodness' sake, shut up, you little fool!' I said. 'What's the good of talking a lot of damned rot like that? You'll be getting yourself into trouble.'

"'I don't care,' he replied. 'I'm not going to be murdered!'

"'Look here,' I said. 'I told you before, that we shouldn't be able to see the land, even if we made it.'

"'You've no proof,' he answered. 'It's only your idea.'

"'Well, I replied. 'Proof, or no proof, the Skipper would only pile her up, if he tried to make the land, with things as they are now.'

"'Let him pile her up,' he answered. 'Let him jolly well pile her up! That would be better than staying out here to

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be pulled overboard, or chucked down from aloft!'

"'Look here, Tammy—' I began; but just then the Second Mate sung out for him, and he had to go. When he came back, I had started to walk to and from, across the fore side of the mainmast. He joined me, and after a minute, he started his wild talk again.

"'Look here, Tammy,' I said, once more. 'It's no use your talking like you've been doing. Things are as they are, and it's no one's fault, and nobody can help it. If you want to talk sensibly, I'll listen; if not, then go and gas to some one else.'

"With that, I returned to the port side, and got upon the spar, again, intending to sit on the pinrail, and have a bit of a talk with him. Before sitting down, I glanced over, into the sea. The action had been almost mechanical; yet, after a few instants, I was in a state of the most intense excitement, and without withdrawing my gaze, I reached out and caught Tammy's arm, to attract his attention.

"'My God!' I muttered. 'Look!'

"'What is it?' he asked, and bent over the rail, beside me. And this is what we saw:—A little distance below the surface there lay a pale-coloured, slightly-domed disk. It seemed only a few feet down. Below it, we saw quite clearly, after a few moments' staring, the shadow of a royal-yard, and, deeper, the gear and standing-rigging of a great mast. Far down among the shadows, I thought, presently, that I could make out the immense, indefinite stretch of vast decks.

"'My God!' whispered Tammy, and shut up. But presently, he gave out a short exclamation, as though an idea had come to him; and got down off the spar, and ran forrard on to the fo'cas'le head. He came running back, after a short look into the sea, to tell me that there was the truck of another great mast coming up there, a bit off the bow, to within a few feet of the surface of the sea.

"IN the meantime, you know, I had been staring like mad down through the water at the huge, shadowy mast just below me. I had traced out bit by bit, until now, I could clearly see the jack-stay, running along the top of the royal-yard; and, you know, the royal itself was set.

"But, you know, what was getting at me more than anything, was a feeling that there was movement down in the water there, among the rigging. I *thought* I could actually see, at times, things moving and glinting faintly and rapidly to and fro in the gear. And once, I was practically certain that something was on the royal-yard, moving in to the mast; as though, you know, it might have come up the leech of the sail. And this way, I got a beastly feeling that there were things swarming down there.

"Unconsciously, I must have leant further and further out over the side, staring; and suddenly—good Lord! how I yelled—I over-balanced, I made a sweeping grab, and caught the fore brace, and with that, I was back in a moment upon the spar. In the same second, almost, it seemed to me that the surface of the water above the submerged truck was broken, and I am sure *now*, I saw something a moment in the air against the ship's side—a sort of shadow in the air; though I did not realise it at the time. Anyway, the next instant, Tammy gave out an awful scream, and was head downwards over the rail, in a second. I had an idea *then* that he was jumping overboard. I collared him by the waist of his britches, and one knee, and then I had him down on the deck, and sat plump on him; for he was struggling and shouting all the time, and I was so breathless and shaken and gone to mush, I could not have trusted my hands to hold him. You see, I never thought *then* it was anything but some influence at work on him; and that he was trying to get loose to go over the side. But I know *now* that I saw the shadow-man that had him. Only, at the time, I was so mixed up, and with the one idea in my head, I was not really able to notice anything, properly. But, afterwards, I comprehended a bit (you can understand, can't you?) what I had seen at the time without taking in.

"And even now looking back, I know that the shadow was only like a faint-seen greyness in the daylight, against the whiteness of the decks, clinging against Tammy.

"And there was I, all breathless and sweating, and quivery with my own tumble, sitting on the little screeching beggar, and he fighting like a mad thing; so that I thought I should never hold him.

"And then I heard the Second Mate shouting, and there came running feet along the deck. Then many hands were

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pulling and hauling, to get me off him.

"'Damn coward!' sung out some one.

"'Hold him! Hold him!' I shouted. 'He'll be overboard!'

"At that, they seemed to understand that I was not ill-treating the youngster; for they stopped manhandling me, and allowed me to rise; while two of them took hold of Tammy, and kept him safe.

"'What's the matter with him?' the Second Mate was singing out. 'What's happened?'

"'He's gone off his head, I think,' I said.

"'What?' asked the Second Mate. But before I could answer him, Tammy ceased suddenly to struggle, and flopped down upon the deck.

"''e's fainted,' said Plummer, with some sympathy. He looked at me, with a puzzled, suspicious air. 'What's 'appened? What's 'e been doin'?'

"'Take him aft into the berth' ordered the Second Mate, a bit abruptly. It struck me that he wished to prevent questions. He must have tumbled to the fact that we had seen something, about which it would be better not to tell the crowd.

"Plummer stooped to lift the boy.

"'No,' said the Second Mate. 'Not you, Plummer. Jessop, you take him.' He turned to the rest of the men. 'That will do,' he told them, and they went forrard, muttering a little.

"I lifted the boy, and carried him aft.

"'No need to take him into the berth,' said the Second Mate. 'Put him down on the after hatch. I've sent the other lad for some brandy.'

"When the brandy came, we dosed Tammy and soon brought him round. He sat up, with a somewhat dazed air. Otherwise, he seemed quiet and sane enough.

"'What's up?' he asked. He caught sight of the Second Mate. 'Have I been ill, Sir?' he exclaimed.

"'You're right enough now, youngster,' said the Second Mate. 'You've been a bit off. You'd better go and lie down."

"'I'm all right now, Sir,' replied Tammy. 'I don't think—'

"'You do as you're told!' interrupted the Second. 'Don't always have to be told twice! If I want you, I'll send for you.'

"TAMMY stood up, and made his way, in rather an unsteady fashion, into the berth. I fancy he was glad enough to lie down.

"'Now then, Jessop,' exclaimed the Second Mate, turning to me. 'What's been the cause of all this? Out with it now, smart!'

"I commenced to tell him; but, almost directly, he put up his hand.

"'Hold on a minute,' he said. 'There's the breeze!'

"He jumped up the port ladder, and sung out to the chap at the wheel. Then down again.

"'Starboard fore brace,' he sung out. He turned to me.

"'You'll have to finish telling me afterwards,' he said.

"'I, I, Sir,' I replied, and went to join the other chaps at the braces.

"As soon as we were braced sharp up on the port tack, he sent some of the watch up to loose the sails. Then he sung out for me.

"'Go on with your yarn now, Jessop,' he said.

"I told him about the great shadow vessel, and I said something about Tammy. . . . I mean about my not being sure *now* whether he *had* tried to jump overboard. Because, you see, I began to realise that I had seen the shadow; and I remembered the stirring of the water above the submerged truck. But the Second did not wait, of course, for any theories; but was away, like a shot, to see for himself. He ran to the side, and looked down. I followed, and stood beside him; yet, now that the surface of the water was blurred by the wind, we could see nothing.

"'It's no good,' he remarked, after a minute. 'You'd better get away from the rail before any of the others see you. Just be taking those halyards aft to the capstan.'

"From then, until eight bells, we were hard at work getting the sail upon her, and when at last eight bells went, I made haste to swallow my breakfast, and get a sleep.

"At midday, when we went on deck for the afternoon watch, I ran to the side; but there was no sign of the great shadow ship. All that watch, the Second Mate kept me working at my paunch mat, and Tammy he put on to his sinnet, telling me to keep an eye on the youngster. But the boy was right enough; as I scarcely doubted now, you know; though—a most unusual thing—he hardly opened his lips the whole afternoon. Then at four o'clock, we went below for tea.

"At four bells, when we came back on

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deck again, I found that the light breeze, which had kept us going during the day, had dropped, and we were only just moving. The sun was low down, and the sky clear. Once or twice, as I glanced across to the horizon, it seemed to me that I caught again that odd quiver in the air that had preceded the coming of the mist; and, indeed, on two separate occasions, I saw a thin wisp of haze drive up, apparently out of the sea. This was at some little distance on our port beam; otherwise, all was quiet and peaceful; and though I stared into the water, I could make out no vestige of that great shadow ship, down in the sea.

"It was some little time after six bells, that the order came for all hands to shorten sail for the night. We took in the royals and t'gallants, and then the three courses. It was shortly after this, that a rumour went round the ship that there was to be no look-out that night after eight o'clock. This naturally created a good deal of talk among the men; especially as the yarn went, that the fo'cas'le doors were to be shut and fastened as soon as it was dark, and that no one was to be allowed on deck.

"'"oo's goin' ter take ther wheels?' I heard Plummer ask.

"'I s'pose they'll 'ave us take 'em as usual,' replied one of the men. 'One of ther officers is bound ter be on ther poop; so we'll 'ave company.'

"Apart from these remarks, there was a general opinion that—if it were true—it was a sensible act on the part of the Skipper. As one of the men said:

"'It ain't likely as there'll be any of us missin' in ther mornin', if we stays in our bunks all ther blessed night.'

"And soon after this, eight bells went.

CHAPTER XIV

THE GHOST PIRATES

"AT the moment when eight bells actually went, I was in the fo'cas'le, talking to four of the other watch. Suddenly, away aft, I heard shouting, and then on the deck overhead, came the loud thudding of some one pomping with a capstan-bar. Straightway, I turned and made a run for the port doorway, along with the four other men. We rushed out through the doorway on to the deck. It was getting dusk; but that did not hide from me a terrible and extraordinary sight. All along the port rail there was a queer, undulating greyness, that moved downwards inboard, and spread over the decks. As I looked, I found that I saw more clearly, in a most extraordinary way. And, suddenly, all the moving greyness resolved into hundreds of strange men. In the half-light, they looked unreal and impossible, as though there had come upon us the inhabitants of some fantastic dream-world. My God! I thought I was mad. They swarmed in upon us in a great wave of murderous, living shadows. From some of the men who must have been going aft for roll-call, there rose into the evening air a loud, awful shouting.

"'Aloft!' yelled some one; but, as I looked aloft, I saw that the horrible things were swarming there in scores and scores.

"My glance dropped from aloft, to find two of the men who had come out from the fo'cas'le with me, rolling upon the deck. They were two indistinguishable masses that writhed here and there across the planks. The brutes fairly covered them. From them, came muffled little shrieks and gasps; and there I stood, and with me were the other two men. A man darted past us into the fo'cas'le, with two grey men on his back, and I heard them kill him. The two men by me, ran suddenly across the fore hatch, and up the starboard ladder on to the fo'cas'le head. Yet, almost in the same instant, I saw several of the grey men disappear up the other ladder. From the fo'cas'le head above, I heard the two men commence to shout, and this died away into a loud scuffling. At that, I turned to see whether I could get away. I stared round, hopelessly; and then with two jumps, I was on the pigsty, and from there upon the top of the deckhouse. I threw myself flat, and waited, breathlessly.

"All at once, it seemed to me that it was darker than it had been the previous moment, and I raised my head, very cautiously. I saw that the ship was enveloped in great billows of mist, and then, not six feet from me, I made out some one lying, face downwards. It was Tammy. I felt safer now that we were hidden by the mist, and I crawled to him. He gave a quick gasp of terror when I touched him; but when he saw who it was, he started to sob like a little kid.

"'Hush!' I said. 'For God's sake be quiet!' But I need not have troubled; for

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the shrieks of the men being killed, down on the decks all around us, drowned every other sound.

"I knelt up, and glanced round and then aloft. Overhead, I could make out dimly the spars and sails, and now as I looked, I saw that the t'gallants and royals had been unloosed and were hanging in the buntlines. Almost in the same moment, the terrible crying of the poor beggars about the decks, ceased; and there succeeded an awful silence, in which I could distinctly hear Tammy sobbing. I reached out, and shook him.

"'Be quiet! Be quiet!' I whispered, intensely. 'THEY'LL hear us!'

"At my touch and whisper, he struggled to become silent; and then, overhead, I saw the six yards being swiftly mast-headed. Scarcely were the sails set, when I heard the swish and flick of gaskets being cast adrift on the lower yards, and realised that ghostly things were at work there.

"FOR a minute or so there was silence, and I made my way cautiously to the after end of the house, and peered over. Yet, because of the mist, I could see nothing. Then, abruptly, from behind me, came a single wail of sudden pain and terror from Tammy. It ended instantly in a sort of choke. I stood up in the mist and ran back to where I had left the kid; but he had gone. I stood dazed. I felt like shrieking out loud. Above me, I heard the flaps of the courses being tumbled off the yards. Down upon the decks, there were the noises of a multitude working in a weird, inhuman silence. Then came the squeal and rattle of blocks and braces aloft. They were squaring the yards.

I remained standing. I watched the yards squared, and then I saw the sails fill suddenly. An instant later, the deck of the house upon which I stood, became canted forrard. The slope increased, so that I could scarcely stand, and I grabbed at one of the wire-winches. I wondered, in a stunned sort of way, what was happening. Almost directly afterwards, from the deck on the port side of the house, there came a sudden, loud, human scream; and immediately, from different parts of the decks there rose, afresh, some most horrible shouts of agony from odd men. This grew into an intense screaming that shook my heart up; and there came again a noise of desperate, brief fighting. Then a breath of cold wind seemed to play in the mist, and I could see down the slope of the deck. I looked below me, toward the bows. The jibboom was plunged right into the water, and, as I stared, the bows disappeared into the sea. The deck of the house became a wall to me, and I was swinging from the winch, which was now above my head. I watched the ocean lip over the edge of the fo'cas'le head, and rush down on to the maindeck, roaring into the empty fo'cas'le. And still all around me came the crying of the lost sailormen. I heard something strike the corner of the house above me, with a dull thud, and then I saw Plummer plunge down into the flood beneath. I remembered that he had been at the wheel. The next instant, the water had leapt to my feet; there came a drear chorus of bubbling screams, a roar of waters, and I was going swiftly down into the darkness. I let go of the winch, and struck out madly, trying to hold my breath. There was a loud singing in my ears. It grew louder. I opened my mouth. I felt I was dying. And then, thank God! I was at the surface, breathing. For the moment, I was blinded with the water, and my agony of breathlessness. Then, growing easier, I brushed the water from my eyes, and so, not three hundred yards away, I made out a large ship, floating almost motionless. At first, I could scarcely believe I saw aright. Then, as I realised that indeed there was yet a chance of living, I started to swim towards you.

"You know the rest. . . ."

APPENDIX

THE SILENT SHIP

I'M THE Third Mate of the *Sangier*, the vessel that picked up Jessop, you know; and he's asked us to write a short note of what we saw from our side, and sign it. The Old Man's set me on to the job, as he says I can put it better than he can.

Well, it was in the first dog-watch that we came up with her, the *Mortzestus* I mean; but it was in the second dog-watch that it happened. The Mate and I were on the poop watching her. You see, we'd signalled her, and she'd not taken any notice, and that seemed queer, as we couldn't have been more than three or four hundred yards off her port beam, and it was a fine evening; so that we could almost have had a tea-fight, if

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they'd seemed a pleasant crowd. As it was, we called them a set of sulky swine, and left it at that.

All the same, you know, we watched her a lot; and I remember, even then I thought it queer how quiet she was. We couldn't hear even her bell go, and I spoke to the Mate about it.

Then, about six bells, they shortened her right down to topsails; and I can tell you that made us stare more than ever, as any one can imagine. And I remember we noticed then, especially, that we couldn't hear a single sound from her, even when the haulyards were let go; and, you know, without the glass, I saw their Old Man singing out something; but we didn't get a sound of it, and we *should* have been able to hear every word.

Then, just after eight bells, the thing Jessop's told us about, happened. Both the Mate and the Old Man said they could see men going up her side, a bit indistinct, you know, because it was getting dusk; but the Second Mate and I half thought we did, and half thought we didn't; but there was something queer; we all knew that; and it looked like a sort of movey mist along her side. I know I felt pretty funny; but it wasn't the sort of thing, of course, to be too sure and serious about until you *were* sure.

After the Mate and the Captain had said they saw the men boarding her, we began to hear sounds from her; very queer at first, and rather like a phonograph makes when it's getting up speed. Then the sounds came properly from her, and we heard them shouting and yelling; and, you know, I don't know even now just what I really thought.

The next thing I remember, there was a thick mist round the ship; and then all the noise was shut off, as if it were all the other side of a door. But we could still see her masts and spars and sails above the misty stuff; and both the Captain and the Mate said they could see men aloft; and I thought I could; but the Second Mate wasn't sure. All the same, though, the sails were all loosed in about a minute, it seemed, and the yards mastheaded. We couldn't see the courses above the mist; but Jessop says they were loosed too, and sheeted home, along with the upper sails. Then we saw the yards squared, and I saw the sails fill bang up with wind; and yet, you know, ours were slatting.

The next thing was the one that hit me more than anything. Her masts took a cant forrard, and then I saw her stern come up out of the mist that was round her. Then, all in an instant, we could hear sounds from the vessel again. And I tell you, the men didn't seem to be shouting, but screaming. Her stern went higher. It was most extraordinary to look at; and then she went plunk down, head foremost, right bang into the mist-stuff.

It's all right what Jessop says, and when we saw him swimming (I was the one who spotted him) we got out a boat quicker than a windjammer ever got out a boat before, I should think.

The Captain and the Mate and the Second and I are all going to sign this.

(Signed) WILLIAM NAWSTON, *Master.*
J. E. G. ADAMS, *First Mate.*
ED. BROWN, *Second Mate.*
JACK T. EVAN, *Third Mate.*

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(Continued from page 6)

chat with him and he told me about his having just recently written around 4,000 more words to one of his new stories. He said, however, that busy as he was, he did not know when he would finish it.

How about giving his biography? I doubt if there was any author whose works you have published that was better liked by your readers as a whole. In fact I bought my first issue of F.F.M. (Vol. 1 No. 1) simply because I saw Merritt's name on the cover, and I have bought it ever since because you have continued to run his stories.

I imagine that I am the only one with a cloth bound copy of "The Metal Monster"—yes, I had a copy of F.F.M. bound in cloth, and Merritt autographed it for me.

I don't know if it is the first of second set of Finlay's portfolios that I have (it's stored away for the duration) so I'm enclosing a check for 60 cents for one while the supply lasts. Incidentally, I was sorry to hear from Merritt that Finlay is now in the Army—so I guess we'll be getting no more of his work for a while.

LT. OSCAR H. STROH.

CHEERS FOR CHESTERTON

G.K.! G.K! Chesterton! Chesterton! Raw! Raw! Raw!

The above inspired cheer, led by a very excited cheerleader was for you, Ed., for planning to reprint "The Man Who Was Thursday" in the next issue of F.F.M.

I didn't think you'd reprint "T.M.W.W.T." because it is—well, too far over the average reader's head. When I first read it I thought it was a very good satire and let it go at that. I read it again some time later and found an entirely "new" book. Little things I hadn't caught before threw new light on the characters' very words. I expect to experience the same thing when I read the story again thirty years from now.

There is one thing that bothers me. In your advance notice about the story you implied that the story "T.M.W.W.T." was one of those murder mystery types of thing. You say something about the anarchists destroying the organization of the world.

How *could* you *cheapen* a fine old story like that?

There is but one thing to be taken seriously in that story and that is the thought behind it. The story is a comedy, a farce. The book is written lightly, with almost *unbelievable* humor.

The ending leaves your stomach slightly "butterflyish." "Sunday" isn't the villain he appears to be, but what *is* he?

This novel is what I term "true" fantasy. You must admit that many of even the "fine" fantasies have a lot of cowboy-Injun stuff in them ("Polaris," "Darkness and Dawn," etc.)

"The King in Yellow" stories come nearest to true fantasy. But they are shorts and it's easier to write "true" in that medium.

Your cover this issue (Dec.) was sickening. Where are the black backgrounds?

Keep Bok and Lawrence working on the illustrations.

C.S.G.

P. S. Another thing of interest about "The Man Who Was Thursday" is the fact that it was subtitled "A Nightmare" which the second half of the story certainly lives up to. The atmosphere is that of "chase." Every sentence has that in it, and as in a dream there's the element of "futility" too.

MORE HODGSON WANTED

I have just finished reading the December issue of F.F.M.

"Three Go Back" by Mitchell dragged slightly, and contained many odd phrases, but was nevertheless enjoyable.

"The Mask" was excellent. I have "The King in Yellow," but I enjoy Bok's illustrations for the stories. I hope you print "The Repairer of Reputations," and have Bok illustrate it. I believe this to be the oddest and most interesting story in Chambers' book.

"The Derelict" was very good. Give us more of Hodgson as soon as possible. Did Bok do the pic for this story? If so, I am afraid he is slipping. He can do much better.

Lawrence's clean-cut style is enjoyable. His illustration on page 71, and the framed drawing for Bradbury's story are especially good.

Ray Bradbury's stories are written in a fresh, pleasing style, and his "King of the Gray Spaces" is no exception.

Leave The Editor's Page and The Readers' Viewpoint as they are, but enlarge Things to Come. It should have a page, at least.

E. R. LOVING.

637 BLACKHAWK ST.,
WESTON, MISS.

Editor's Note: Bok illustrated "The Derelict." He also did the beautiful work for "The Mask."

NEW POLICY OKAY

So far, the change in F.F.M.'s policy has turned out okay, except for one thing. Couldn't you arrange to have just one short Munsey reprint an issue? For instance, "Adrift in the Unknown."

By all means, let's have the rest of "The King in Yellow." Even though you've reprinted the best of the lot, "The Mask," the rest of the stories are excellent. Never print anything by Burroughs. A great many of them are available in book form. Has anyone read "The Cat in the Canebrake?" It's a short story, and one of the weirdest I've read.

About the December issue:

1. "The Mask" (of course)
2. "Three Go Back" (much too long, but an excellent story)
3. "The Derelict" (swell suspense)
4. "King of the Gray Spaces" (where did Bradbury get that slang?)

The pics are all right—but, oh! for Finlay!

By the way, I have some old F.F.M.'s and F.N.'s. Anyone need "The Snake Mother," "The Blind Spot," "The Face in the Abyss," or anything else like that?

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Keep up the good work.

BOB SMITH.

1834 EYE ST., N. W.
WASHINGTON, D. C.

A MESSAGE FOR FINLAY . .

Of all the fantasy stories to present themselves before my critical optics, William Hope Hodgson's "The Derelict" certainly stands as one of the greatest. Never has a yarn excited me so. The vivid descriptions of the living fungi plus an eerie atmosphere of suspense and horror combine to make a tale that truly deserves the name "classic." I had about as much strength left as a banana peel when I had finished. "The Derelict" almost drove me to gnawing rugs, like Adolf, the paper hanger. Thanks for such a tasty literary lunch.

Concerning the other stories, the book-lengther "Three Go Back" was solid, readable entertainment but (in my humble opinion) fell slightly short of its build-up. From the promise that the novel would have "much the atmosphere of A. Merritt's finest works" us innocent readers were led to expect something really extraordinary. Did we get it? Not exactly. Oh, it was good—but not especially the great fantasy.

"The Mask," of course, was excellent. Personally, I preferred "The Yellow Sign," but that's a matter of taste. "The Mask" did a neat job of filling the bill. Please, *please,* please make "The King in Yellow" a regular feature for as long as it lasts.

Another king: Ray Bradbury's "King of the Gray Spaces." Tsk! Tsk! Jerry Todd à la 3943 A.D. Very well done. though, Mr. Bradbury's ever-fascinating style.

Now comes the artwork. The more I see of Lawrence, the more I like him. An interesting combination of Finlay and Paul, if such a thing can be possible. Bok can be good without any effort whatsoever. Finlay will be missed enormously. His brilliant and weird drawings will always be head-and-shoulders above *any* competitors. Good luck, Virgil; hope to see you back soon.

Do I see double or are there *two* Chad Oliver communiques tossed in the December letter section? That's okay—he's a first-rate pen-pusher (or should I say "key puncher?") I, too, join my infinitesimal voice with those who demand "mysteries" chopped off the magazine's name. Suggestion department: call it *Famous Fantasy.*

F.F.M. is, beyond a doubt, the finest fantasy mag in the field. By giving the newer fans (like me) a chance to read all-time classics, you do us all an unrepayable favor. Thank you sincerely.

JOE KENNEDY.

84 BAKER AVE.,
DOVER, N. J.

CAN SCIENCE CREATE LIFE?

Perhaps you can answer a question which has long been puzzling me. The question is, has science *created* life, no matter how small or minute? I cannot tell you how much I would appreciate your help in this matter.

A. ARONSON.

392 EAST 4TH ST.,
BROOKLYN, NEW YORK.

WILLY LEY REPLIES

Dear Editor:

It is not at all surprising that Mr. Aronson is puzzled by the question he mentions, since it is just about the most difficult question there is. For the same reason it is very difficult to answer this question with just one sentence. But it may be said that, so far, nobody has definitely succeeded in producing living matter.

I have the suspicion that Mr. Aronson dimly remembers the experiments that were conducted in 1907 (and preceding years) by the Russian, Martin Kuckuck M.D., who lived in St. Petersburg (now Leningrad) and who "created" something that looked like simple living cells by dropping tiny pieces of salts of barium—slightly radio-active salts, it seems—on mixtures of various substances like peptone, glycerine etc, with sea water.

I have read his original report and at first glance it looks rather convincing. Those "cells" ate, grew, moved and multiplied by fission. But all that, strange as it may seem, does not quite prove that they were actually alive. Biologists know a large number of neat little demonstrations of such apparent life processes which have nothing at all to do with life. For example: aluminum always protects its surface by a thin film of its own oxide. If you "wound" that film, another will form in fractions of a second. But under certain conditions you can keep it "wounded" by means of an electric spark. Then you'll see a neat little "tree" grow out of the wound, looking like moss, but being nothing but aluminum oxide.

Another demonstration of this kind can be made with a small sliver of glass, coated with shellac and a drop of chloroform. The drop of chloroform will "attack" the sliver of glass, flow over and around it, "eat" the shellac off and finally eject the glass just as an amoeba ejects the indigestible parts of its tiny prey. A movie short of this performance came close to fooling professional biologists who grew suspicious only because they noticed that the "amoeba" had no nucleus.

What I want to say with these examples is that Dr. Kuckuck's "barium cells" may have fooled him by such behavior, but that refined modern tests would be able to detect a difference.

As a matter of fact this is the general attitude of biologists of today as regards Dr. Kuckuck's experiments. And they have the additional attitude that they don't really want a surprise success of this kind. One of them expressed it, only a few years after Dr. Kuckuck published his report, in saying that "such a success would be without much value. It would only show that it can be done but would not teach anything, because it could be just one of two things. Either it would be accidental and then the underlying causes

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would still have to be explored and determined, or else it would be the result of the precise knowledge of the underlying causes. And in that case the experiment itself would be only the proof for previously gathered knowledge.

In general, biologists have desisted from experimenting wildly for a chance success for these reasons and have concentrated on research to determine the underlying causes. The consensus of opinion is now that life originated in the primeval oceans under the action of the ultra-violet rays of the sun. "When ultra-violet light acts on a mixture of water, carbon dioxide and ammonia, a vast variety of organic substances are made, including sugars and apparently some of the materials from which proteins are built up. This fact has been demonstrated in the laboratory by Baly of Liverpool and his colleagues. In the present world such substances, if left about, decay—that is to say they are destroyed by micro-organisms. But before the origin of life they must have accumulated. . . ." (Quotation from J. B. S. Haldane's *The Inequality of Man.*)

In other words, food for small organisms came into existence before the organisms themselves appeared. And it is quite probable that they were as tiny as viruses which still demonstrate that a thing may be only "half-alive", if you consider anything below the rather complicated unicellular organisms as "dead" or, at least, as not fully "alive." Life probably started in that primeval soup of radiation-made substances in the form of large molecules, also synthesized by ultra-violet radiation. Most of these molecules depended on very special other molecules for "food" and perished if they did not find them. But some did not have to be so choosy and those were the ones that led to "life."

After the war science may try to duplicate that process in the laboratory but there is a chance that it, though essentially correct in its approach, may fail because of one factor: time. We don't know whether such a synthesis of life is not wrapped up in a time factor, which is to say that a certain step will simply require so and so much time without any possibility of speeding it up. If such is the case—and it might well be the case—science may end up in knowing the precise steps and procedure required but in finding that the experiment, to be completed, would require several hundred years, too long to watch for any set of observers.

HE BROUGHT US HODGSON

At last! William Hope Hodgson finally gets recognition in *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* magazine. The reprinting of "The Derelict" and your promise to publish "The Ghost Pirates," makes me almost believe that my 10-year campaign to obtain recognition for Hodgson in this country is finally getting results. Believe me, I'm waiting for your readers' verdict with keen anticipation.

I don't think the illustration for "The Derelict" did justice to the story. It left me cold. The illustrator failed to picture the horror that Hodgson conveyed with words.

I was glad to note the favorable reaction to Chambers' stories. I was quite confident that most of your readers would like the tales, particularly "The Yellow Sign."

Keep up the good work.

H. C. Koenig.

c/o F.F.M.

"THREE GO BACK" GRAND!

Your December number is the first genuine F.F.M.-ish one since Popular took over. "Three Go Back" is grand-d-d! Stories like the shorts by Chambers and Hodgson are among the best of their genre. They make this a really outstanding issue.

"The Iron Star" was lousy-y-y; "Ark of Fire" . . . . how I would have gone for that one when I was younger!

The soon-to-be published "Ghost Pirates" is a super selection. Can't you also run the two novels that are connected with it? And how about "The Night Land"? True, it's very long, but it's a corking tale. A friend had a copy of the book and I seriously meant to steal it, only somebody beat me to it. Dog-gone it, I have the worst luck!

I would suggest that you refrain from publishing Haggard, at least for a while. Copies of his books are rather easily obtained. You should print the writers whose books are so hard to find . . . especially English ones, like Hodgson, Blackwood, and others.

"The Man Who Was Thursday" is a good story all right, but I disagree with your listing it as fantasy of the F.F.M. type.

Your illustrations are adequate.

Jupiter de Martian.

526 So. Broadway,
Lexington, 20, Ky.

P. S. I'm no "Martian" even if my name is spelled that way. It is rightfully pronounced *de Mar-shan.*

MORE PRAISE FOR MITCHELL

Having read the December issue of F.F.M., I wish to add my few comments of undoubted praise. It is the second issue I have had so far, and it has a unique flavor of its own that ranks it extremely high among pulp fantasy magazines.

The cover, by I know not whom, has a definitely time-worn theme, and gains nothing from style or handling.

Bradbury's short had a good idea, but he tried to develop it far too literally, and not freely enough. Fairly readable, however.

"The Mask" by Chambers, I see no reason for printing. I could see no reason for *anything* that happened, and the theme that seems to bind the book together—The Yellow Book and its horrors—is made too casual by the repeated insertions of spots like this: ". . . Picking up a book at random . . . Alas, I had found 'The King in Yellow' . . ." They're fools if they leave it lying around like that!

That for my dislikes. We now come to the novel. You have, in choosing "Three Go Back"

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picked something of which F.F.M. has a right to be proud. This story, in addition to excellent scientific detail, and introspection, is also well characterized and far more full-bodied than I had expected. The aura of realism within its own sphere I heartily second; but the few detractions, such as the note of optimism at the end, entirely unexplained and hazy, only immaterially decreases its value. The illustrations for this were poor.

And finally, Hodgson's story: For purely personal reasons—in the main being the fact that I never have been able to abide sea stories—I found some of this uninteresting. But very well written, and as you say, authentic.

Your reader's department is becoming one of the best in the pulp s-f and fantasy field, mainly because of the sincerity of the authors.

RAY KARDEN.

409 TWELFTH ST.,
CLOQUET, MINN.

CONCERNING DEC. ISSUE

Congratulations are in order for you, anent your splendid choice, "Three Go Back." It reminded me ever so much of A. Merritt's masterful dialogue, and yet it retained that prevailing air of originality throughout the entire story. J. Leslie Mitchell will certainly take his place among fantasy's great authors, and he has carved a niche—left an unmistakable impression in my repertoire of magnificent writers. I may look forward to more by him, *n'est-ce pas?*

William Hope Hodgson's tale brought to mind another such story in an earlier issue of F.F.M. by Phillip Fisher. It was good—darn good, but why not publish some of the yarns in the old *Argosy?*

"The Mask" does not emulate "Demoiselle d'Ys" but is worthy of publishing. Robert W. Chambers is ever pleasing. I wish I could get ahold of the complete "The King in Yellow" for my collection.

Ray Bradbury's offering was very neat, but I'm afraid not up to F.F.M.'s set standard. Ray's a good writer, and in time, if he continues his splendid work, will be among the best.

Now to the illustrations. The cover, if you made the hero a bit more intelligent looking and close-cropped his hair, would be exactly like any cheap jungle pulp. The drawing isn't too bad, but the subject! Of all the other possibilities for scenes Lawrence must pick that one— Let Lawrence stick to his own style. Don't have him try to be another Finlay. After all, Virgil isn't going to be gone forever, you know, and why not let this other artist free himself of the master's intricacy, and allow him to exercise his own particular technique just to fill the gap? Lawrence is good. Bok has popped up with two beautiful pics in F.F.M. Bok has a style—a way of drawing that is as effective as it is simple. He places one right into that certain mood, makes one want to read the story he illustrates. Often though, he turns to bare grease-pencil and ink outlines, and more often to just plain outlines. I've seen only a few of his drawings that were intricate and took patience. His for "The Mask" was one of them. Compare this one with the one for "The Derelict." Second best in the issue was Lawrence's for Bradbury's yarn, wherein he copies Finlay. Fans will probably jump down my throat for this, but I would like to see variety, at least till Finlay returns, in the pages of F.F.M. anent art.

With that I recede to the murky depths of my labyrinthine enclosure, where I will brood till the next issue of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* is out.

CHARLES MCNUTT.

2721 16TH ST.,
EVERETT, WASH.

P. S. That blurb for "The Derelict" was a definite example of what the world is coming to (Quote) ". . . . plop, plop, plop!" (Unquote).

APPRECIATION OF HODGSON

It is very infrequently indeed that a short story takes first place in the quality line-up of an issue of F.F.M.—Maupassant's "Horla" was the last to do so, I believe—but William Hope Hodgson's "The Derelict" definitely stands out head and shoulders over the other stories for December.

I once lived by the sea, and I know it is very easy to believe that matters out there on the waters are "darker than you think." The eerie fantasies of Philip M. Fisher which you published under the *ancien régime*—Lovecraft's tremendously powerful "Shadow Over Innsmouth"—Francis Stevens' "Claimed," these and scores like them possess a special appeal of their own, with a *real* feeling to them that is seldom achieved in weird fiction. And, indeed, there are comparatively few authors who can create the particular mood of this type of story.

All too often an author is either a fantasy writer who knows little or nothing about the sea, or a spinner of sea tales who has no sense of the macabre. But Hodgson was evidently a seaman and a fantasite, for "The Derelict" strikes a balnace that is nearly perfect. This story is every bit as good as Phil Fisher's tales, and, if this is one of the author's *minor* works, we certainly demand more of William Hope Hodgson! We'll be waiting anxiously for "The Ghost Pirates" and any other Hodgson yarns you care to give us.

"Three Go Back" comes in second, a most enthralling piece of work, but hardly a second Merritt as you claimed. What there was of it was very well done indeed—superbly done, rather—characterization, description, writing, all a splendid job—but it just wasn't pretentious enough to be compared with the mighty sweep of A. Merritt at his best. It reminded me more of George Allan England's "Darkness and Dawn," but that's just one fan's opinion. Excellent prehistoric yarn, very absorbing and well worthy of F.F.M.

"The Mask" is a splendid little yarn, even though the plot is the oldest one in the book—Pygmalion. However, I disagree with Lesser as to its importance, preferring to concur with

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H. P. Lovecraft's choice of "The Yellow Sign."

"King of the Gray Spaces was passable, just barely. And the title could lead to something *big*.

By the way, here's my report for 1943:

1. "The Iron Star"—Taine.
2. "Doorway Into Time"—Moore.
3. "The Derelict"—Hodgson.
4. "Ark of Fire"—Hawkins.
5. "The Yellow Sign"—Chambers.

"Into the Infinite" was disqualified as being a 1942 story. Best issue: September. Best cover: March. Best illustrations: September.

PAUL CARTER.

156 S. UNIVERSITY ST.,
BLACKFOOT, IDAHO.

PRAISE FOR LAWRENCE

The Dec. issue was picked up by me on the newsstands yesterday evening after work, and was avidly gone through by the time I had reached home.

As I scanned through the magazine several things seemed to me to stand out more than others. The first, and most prominent, was the absence of Finlay from the cover. It seemed as if an old friend had gone. After all these many copies of good old F.F.M., friend Virgil was completely absent. I knew before this issue hit the stands that Finlay was now in the Army, but I was hoping that he had at least illustrated a short story before leaving.

Another very noticeable thing was the remarkable quality of Lawrence's drawings. The illustration for Bradbury's short was really superb. It looks as if Finlay has at last met someone who can come somewhere near dethroning him.

I think some of the letters in this issue are too hard on Finlay. The readers should take into consideration the fact that he may have been pressed for time knowing he was to go into the Army soon—at any rate I will still bet anyone that Finlay can better any and all contenders for the fantasy artist's crown.

The novel, shorts and illustrations for the Sept. number were all satisfactory. Taine can really spin a thrilling story. I've never been disappointed by him yet. Chambers' "Yellow Sign" was nice and gruesome, but I was glad to see "The Mask" appear in the Dec. issue, as I like that particular story better than any of the others in "The King in Yellow." The Bok cartoons were superb. I'm certainly glad to see him back.

"Three Go Back" is a really super fantasy novel. It still can't compare with anything by Merritt, though.

I feel very dismal and dejected whenever I think of the many wonderful stories that we shall never see now, since the death of the peer of fantasy authors. Merritt's death was a blow to every lover of his magnificent stories and we shall mourn him for many years to come. I console myself, though, with the collection of his books I have in my possession. Besides a complete set of his books I have—of course—complete files of F.F.M. and F.N. with the novels of his therein. I would liked to have had "The Ship of Ishtar" in F.F.M. with Finlay illustrations.

The letter column this issue was nice and long, and with some excellent letters. Keep it that way.

I wish you all the luck in the world with my favorite fantasy mag, and hope for the best possible results under the present conditions.

A. C. ROGERS, JR.

1744 WEST DRESCHER,
SAN DIEGO, 10, CALIF.

P. S. How about using something of Arthur Machen's, maybe "The Great God Pan"?

"THREE GO BACK" A CLASSIC

I have been reading your magazine now for the past year and a half, and have not as yet found anything to kick about. I am thoroughly sold on F.F.M. and have read other fantasy-fiction and science-fiction magazines but have not found anything to compare with your magazine.

I will take back what I said about not having anything to kick about; I have just one complaint and that is: publishing quarterly instead of monthly (I know, the paper shortage—well, let's get this war over with as quickly as possible by buying more war bonds and more war bonds.)

As I said before, I have been buying your magazine now for the last year and a half. Well, I will now tell you which stories I liked best. First and foremost, the "Palos of the Dog Star Pack" trilogy. I have "Palos" and "The Mouthpiece of Zitu"—if any reader has another story that goes with these I'll be only too glad to know. Second, "Three Go Back" (your most recent). Third, "The Elixir of Hate." Fourth, "The Golden City." Fifth, "The Ark of Fire." Sixth, "The Brand New World."

Keep up the very good work.

ROBERT H. SKEGGS.

OAK HILL SPRINGS,
NEW BUFFALO, MICH.

ABOUT "SECOND PORTFOLIO"

The reproductions on the white coated paper of the second group of Finlay drawings were really beautiful, and your selection of pictures was excellent.

Anything of William Hope Hodgson's will be welcome—though I'm especially anxious to read "The Night Land."

I don't suppose there's any possibility of your issuing F.F.M. more frequently so long as present conditions prevail—but I sincerely hope you'll go back to monthly publication after the war.

Best of luck with F.F.M.

L. A. E.

c/o F.F.M.

Editor's Note: There are a few portfolios left.

MORE TAINE STORIES!

Well, once again I hold before me after six long months the September issue of my favorite fantasy magazine, *Famous Fantastic Mys-*

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teries. Please let's not have such a long wait between issues or I'll die a slow death. But the wait was well worth it. Here are the ratings on it. First, I was pleasantly surprised by Finlay's beautiful cover, one of the best the old master has ever done. He actually projected beauty and cold lurking horror into it. Second, we come to Taine's novel. "The Iron Star" lived up to and beyond my expectations of it. The only words I can say to fit this master's work is, "Bravo, Taine, and much more of him." Third, aha, here we come to one of the newest themes I have read in fantasy, (and I've read plenty) "Doorway Into Time," by C. L. Moore. Yes, this story is one of the most beautiful I have ever read. C. L. Moore is one of the few authors who inject beauty with horror into their stories. She handles her characters with delicacy and if you look close you can see in some of her sentences subtle satire. All I can do is ask, pray, and hope for a sequel. And, by the way, who was it that said women couldn't write? Fourth, "The Yellow Sign" by Robert W. Chambers. I see you reprinted another of that famous series of short stories from "The King in Yellow." Give us one each issue from this famous fantasy, from which it is said that the late H. P. Lovecraft derived his famous legend of an ancient book.

Last of all we come to Nanek's verse for the "Dwellers in the Mirage" which was truly fitting to A. Merritt's epic novel. And that winds up another superb issue of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries.*

Why don't you get Clark Ashton Smith to do some poetry for you? He is one of the best, if not the best author and poet in fantasy. So, until next issue I leave you with the thought: Hats off to F.F.M., the only magazine that tries to make its stories beautiful! HATS OFF!

HARRY HONIG.

256 26TH AVE.
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF.

"IRON STAR" STRICTLY GOOD

I have been a newsstand reader of F.F.M. for several years, but only today did there occur just that combination of opportunity and inclination which would permit me to express my high opinion of your swell mag. The stimulus for this outburst was provided by Taine's swell novel "The Iron Star" which is strictly good stuff. In the same issue, "The Yellow Sign" by Chambers also rings the bell; it is a horror story in the best traditions of Lovecraft himself. I cannot begin to praise sufficiently the grand illustrations of Virgil Finlay, and, to back up what I say, here is my order for his new portfolio of drawings and for my subscription to F.F.M.

Fantastically yours,
JOSEPH A. BLUNDON.

94 MAIN ST.,
KEYSER, WEST VA.

PRAISE FOR BRADBURY

I was feeling rather tired and mean this morning as a consequence of just having been moved 1500 miles by Uncle Sam; so when I picked up F.F.M. I was gleefully preparing to dissect it mercilessly.

But I've found that one can fuss only about how good F.F.M. is, not *whether* it's good.

My chief criticism is the common one. Why is the best fantasy magazine the one that appears least?

If a half dozen other mags, certainly far less popular, can appear monthly or bi-monthly, why can't you?

Next: Why do you have the ban on magazine reprints? As some one suggested, I believe, why not have the readers send in their choices of the two or three mag stories they wanted most?

You could use them between back reprints to make up a monthly mag, couldn't you?

I'm not against using the type of story you have now, though. "Ark of Fire" and "Iron Star" were above average, and "Three Go Back" was exceptionally good. These were all stories that are practically unobtainable, and that should be your standard in choosing others.

Now for the current issue.

"Three Go Back" was entirely new to me. I was almost afraid to start out because stories about a man and woman being hurled into prehistoric surroundings are so common and so unoriginal. However, the exceptionally good writing and the applications of a little more imagination than usual in such types, transformed it into a real fantasy landmark.

I particularly liked the conception of the Cro-Magnans as attractive, innocent natives instead of the bestial monstrosities so popular in time-travel yarns.

I've never heard of Mitchell before. Is he one of these hit-and-run fantasy authors like Hawkins?

"The Derelict" was interesting and must have been quite a thriller at its first appearance.

I hesitate to disagree with so many readers, but I feel that "Demoiselle d'Ys" was the only Chambers yarn that was really good.

Although its title was very misleading, "King of the Gray Spaces" was a brilliantly executed little piece. When I think of the countless super epics I've read in which the space hungry youth usually ends up fighting pirates, Martians, etc., and I compare them with this simple but powerful short; well, I hate to think of the vast floods of science fiction that are so meaningless and pointless. If Bradbury can do that well, I hope that you will get him as a regular.

In conclusion I'll inflict my hopes for future issues upon you. "Last and First Men" by Olaf Stapledon, "Cosmos," (that would really be a prize if you could get it), and best of all —one of Merritt's novels. Those stories mentioned by L.A.E. over which Merritt was supposed to be working all sound terrifically good.

PVT. OSCAR G. BERRY.

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APPRECIATION OF A. MERRITT

I have only recently had the good fortune of escaping from Europe, and am not yet acquainted with the treasures of your strange land, strange to me—America. However, I will certainly affirm that F.F.M. has been one of the most pleasing discoveries I have made since my arrival: it certainly is an aristocrat among magazines, and I only wish it would be on a monthly instead of a quarterly basis.

However, war is war, and one can only hope. I have been fascinated by the fantastic for many years, and, when in France read avidly everything related to it. But recently I have come over to the idea that the fantastic is the only kind of literature that really gives complete pleasure, because, if I may qoute a friend of mine, "the fantastic is always beautiful, in fact, only the fantastic is beautiful." To wit, where would "Macbeth" be without the unreal and the marvelous?

I have been reading A. Merritt's stories in back issues of F.F.M.: never have such magnificent stories ever been wrought by another pen. Dahut! Dahut! Her name rings with the sea. Beside the extraordinary fantasy of his tales, Merritt has created human beings who are truly immortal. Mme. Mandilip and Dahut, especially the latter, are prototypes of the Witch, and also of Woman. Manon Lescaut, in the XXth Century, would have been Dahut, that is to say less unconsciously devilish!

Have you ever considered publishing stories by the German Romantics of the XIXth Century? Arnim (not the general, but his great-great-grandfather), Hoffmann, Tiech and others are all great mystery weavers. Hoffmann, notably, is a forerunner of Merritt's Mme. Mandilip, having been often preoccupied with living dolls. As for poetry, do keep up publishing it.

I shouldn't hang around and kibitz—I can't help it, F.F.M. excites me too much.

So I conclude this letter, and go back to the reading of your December issue. I have read the short stories in it—both being good, although Chambers' strange idea of French and art in general is rather exasperating. I would just like to see two infinitesimal artists as Rodin and Monet excite Paris.

CHARLES DUITS.

36 WEST 12TH ST.,
NEW YORK CITY.

P. S. As I have just finished "Three Go Back," I add an angry postscript: that is definitely not Fantasy. If the author had cut off the end and the beginning, it would have just been a recasting of pseudo-scientific ravings. Let us have imaginative stories to the utmost, like "The Derelict" for example. By the way, if there are any rabid fantaddicts (in opposition to scientifictionneers!) I would like to hear from them!

THE ARMY REPORTS

The loss of Finlay and Paul in F.F.M. is grievous indeed, but Lawrence is fine.

"Three Go Back" is very fine, in spite of a hackneyed and unconvincing plot. It was written with easy skill and overtones of profound meaning; and the characters were human beings, not supermen. More work as well done as this would be more than welcome.

I'm delighted to see something of Hodgson in your pages, and to hear that "The Ghost Pirates" is scheduled. What I'd really like to read, though, is "The House on the Borderland," and "The Night Land." Lovecraft's descriptions of these are most tantalizing.

The stories in "The King in Yellow" are known to me, and are high in my esteem.

Ray Bradbury is making a name for himself as one of the most promising new authors. "King of the Gray Spaces" is a work of real skill, a delightful story which indicates for Ray a distinguished literary career. It's plotless, of course, but superbly written. A few new stories of such quality as this have a definite place in F.F.M. Just be sure you don't let anything ordinary get by.

"Readers' Viewpoint" is appreciated. Two things about it impressed me particularly. One was the large number of letters pleading —quite pathetically, now!—for new stories by Merritt. L.A.E.'s description of those now never-to-be-completed stories is heart-rending. I'd love to read them even in their incomplete form. But for heaven's sake let's not have them "completed" by some hack!

The other thing that impressed me was that nearly every letter beseeched more Munsey reprints. I feel the same way.

However, publication of stories by writers like Taine, Hodgson, Chesterton, Chambers, etc., keeps F.F.M. in a lofty position in fantasy—or for that matter, *all* magazines. I dream of the day when, in a format similar to that of the new *Argosy*, F.F.M. will dress the aristocratic part.

And, oh, yes, by all means investigate those unpublished John Taine novels. F.F.M. is the logical magazine in which to publish them.

PVC. PAUL H. SPENCE.

INDICK APPROVES

I was very happy to find F.F.M. out again. And the December was indeed a fine issue. Imagine! A Hodgson and a Chambers story in one issue! I have not read the issue yet, except for the Bradbury short story, but the stories look good. The "King of the Gray Spaces," incidentally was quite good to my mind, though no classic. I suppose the boy was fourteen years old . . . but his talk seemed more like some scientifiction writer's talk.

I sure was sorry that Virgil Finlay will be gone for the duration. I'm sure, though, all fantasy fans will welcome him back "when the lights go on again."

The substitute artists were very good. I especially liked Lawrence's piece for the Bradbury story. There was a great deal of character and thought to the picture. Bok's work for "The Mask" was wonderful!!! Just the type of work I've wanted to see. His "Derelict" picture was inconsequential—it

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somewhat expressed the feeling of terror, but had nothing in it.

Lawrence's drawing for "Three Go Back" (I presume they were his) were very nice. They were not ornate as were the Finlay drawings—but yet had a simple charm, especially the one for "looking upon mankind's childhood." The two full-page drawings were quite good.

As for the next issue's story, G. K. Chesterton's "The Man Who Was Thursday," I read it long, long ago. As I recall it was a spy-mystery thriller with a very cryptic fantastic ending.

I liked the cover, by Lawrence, I presume, but let's not have too many of these cave-men scenes. In addition, if the covers would place a little more attention on the scene, I think it would be better. As it is now, we usually have a girl and a guy with all else incidental. Why not have more of the "Golden City" type cover, featuring a weird or exotic background? Also, occasionally have a cover of larger scope, make the figures smaller, and the scenes larger. Since you have apparently decided to drop the black "color" background perhaps you could carry through these suggestions with profit.

And—progress will continue to be slow unless this quarterly publication stuff is forgotten and bi-monthly publication resumed. If *Adventure* could jump to 160 pages *per month*, using up a total of *384* extra pages per annum, I think that F.F.M. could go bi-monthly with a resultant increase of only two issues or only 288 pages of its present quota per year. The 144 page need not be increased, I'll concede the extra 16 pages to *Adventure*, but those extra issues per year would make a big difference to us readers!!! How's about it?

The letter section is very interesting this time. I had surmised you liked these "gooey" (!) letters of mine, but two in one issue—well!! Incidentally, the name is "Ben" not "Bert"; you're excused, though. Maybe my writing is pretty awful at that.

Leaving the frivolous tone—a friend of mine just wrote to me that Mr. Merritt has passed away. What a blow to fantasy this is. For, the "Lord of Fantasy" can never be replaced. The few stories of his that I have read have convinced me of this. You know, Merritt always signified the last of the old guard of fantasy to me . . . with Austin Hall, Homer Eon Flint, George Allan England, Stanley G. Weinbaum, Lovecraft and a few others all gone, only Merritt remained of that great group. And now he's gone. It seems to me that F.F.M. is a shadow of the Golden Era of fantasy fiction; no modern writer can compare to those old time greats. Also, trends have changed. Instead of "Moon Pool" and "Blind Spot," we have in the 1940 fantasy a staccato fiction with ray-guns, supergals and bug-eyed monsters of all shapes and sizes.

The pure fantasy was popular long before science-fiction made its bow . . . but it started going out. Merritt's "Dwellers in the Mirage" is, it seems to me, the last of the old-type fantasies—and yet it is as vital and alive as any of the two-bit works. Yes, I don't think we will have any more "Blind Spots" or "Moon Pools" coming.

BEN INDICK.

45 PERSHING AVE.,
ELIZABETH, N. J.

AWAITING "GHOST PIRATES"

Just a line complimenting you on the fine stories you are continuing to print. In the past three issues I especially enjoyed "Ark of Fire," and "The Derelict." I am awaiting the William Hope Hodgson novel. I didn't care for John Taine's "Iron Star."

Please go monthly again.

Your policy is okay but don't print any new stories and try to put in a Munsey classic occasionally.

I can supply readers with any issues of F.F.M. and F.N. and I would like to purchase a few 1930 magazines.

I was very sorry to read in the paper about the death of A. Merritt.

CLAUDE HELD.

494 CARLTON ST.,
BUFFALO, N. Y.

BRICKBATS AND BOUQUETS

I would like to put my two cents worth in on the new F.F.M.

Have just received the new December 1943 issue and it looks great though I have not had a chance to read any of the stories. The cover (by Lawrence isn't it?) is almost up to a Finlay status. By the way, all science-fiction will miss Finlay's marvelous art work, now that he's in the Army.

Now for my grouches concerning the new F.F.M.

1. We are barred from ever entering the portals of the great Munsey classics through *Famous Fantastic Mysteries.*

2. The old works of Merritt, Hall, Flint, Farley, England, Smith, Stevens, etc., etc., etc. can never be renewed.

3. The old monthly status is gone but this can be forgiven by the war (but can't you at least change it to a bi-monthly?)

4. Why no more clipped edges?

Now for what I like about the new F.F.M.

1. What Munsey withheld you have given us. Munsey never printed a story in the old magazine that was ever out of its own publications (except for a few, I think, in the early issues.)

2. The story the "Ark of Fire" was excellent—one of the ten best. "The Iron Star" running a close second.

I know at this time we are all saddened by the death of A. Merritt but his marvelous fantasies will live on as long as science-fiction remains, and even after. Also couldn't someone else finish his uncompleted stories? I think John Taine could do the job.

Collectors' Note. If anyone would like to get an *Argosy* of March 1910 and a *Cavalier*, March, 1914, please write.

ELI NEIMAN.

180 EAST SECOND ST.,
NEW YORK.

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FRIENDLY SUGGESTIONS

The December F.F.M. has just been obtained and all the departments carefully perused, the fiction being saved for the last as is my custom. The loss of Finlay is truly a body blow, and Paul is a great loss too, but when Uncle Sam needs these men there is not much any of us can say. The cover for the December issue is good, and the artist, whoever he is, has done a commendable job.

It was interesting to follow the tenor of the letters published in Readers' Viewpoint. Being one of the die-hards on the subject of reprints and the continuance of the Munsey classics, I think I was among the first to write in and protest the change when the news of Popular ownership and the new policy became known.

Perhaps the wiser ones are those who waited a while before writing. Anyhow, I am impressed by the letters you chose to publish this time and the fact that most of them are still asking for the Munsey classics along with the fine stories being used under the new policy.

May I offer (in all friendliness) the following ideas on the subject of reprints: The greatest magazine the world has ever known is *The Reader's Digest* which is almost all reprints. The present boom in the 25 cent paper book field has resulted because the public likes to buy and read stories of former years and after the original publication has had its run. Since, as I am informed (or perhaps misinformed) Popular now has the ownership of the old Munsey files and copyrights, how are the lovers of fantasy ever to have the chance to read the rest of the old Munsey classics unless Popular chooses to relent and release some of these for publication?

Please accept my thanks for the fine reader's department you are still conducting. The letter of Mr. Cecil M. Hinote was especially enjoyed and expressed the feeling of many of us so well. He expressed an idea which many may not have thought of. When Popular acquired F.F.M. they not only acquired a magazine and a name, but they also acquired an enormous following of readers, without which the magazine would be worthless.

Then does not this reader clientele deserve some consideration on the selection of stories? I am living in hope and remaining loyal to the magazine, in the belief that Popular will see all of these points and in the not too distant future see fit to permit these reprints again.

Popular is doing a fine job with *Argosy*, and for that deserves much praise. All of the old *Argosy* fans are hoping to see this fine old magazine take and keep its rightful place as the leader of the all-fiction field and a slick second to none.

In keeping with the present policy of F.F.M. may I request that you consider printing Edgar Rice Burroughs' story, "Ben, King of Beasts" which appeared in the *New York Evening World* in Oct. 1915? Also, I wonder if you are familiar with the story "One Man Show" by Tiffany Thayer? This is a natural for F.F.M. but it should be illustrated by V. Finlay even if you have to send to an Army camp to have him do it.

CHARLES W. WOLFE.
821 LINCOLN AVE.,
LAS VEGAS, NEW MEXICO.

F.F.M.'s QUALITY THE SAME

I read with dismay when I first perceived that F.F.M. had been sold to another publishing house. Thoughts rushed through my mind when I read the Editor's Page of the March issue. You were correct when you wrote ". . . it is only natural that there should be lot of speculation as to the present and future aims and policies of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*.

I am a great believer in facts, and I am interested in the consequences of this sale of the Munsey Publications. I am deeply sorry to say that I have only been reading F.F.M. steadily for about a year and a half. In that time I have been treated to some of the most wonderful, beautiful, and stirring fantasy fiction that I have ever read. I will go so far as to say that I have found, in the past, between the pages of F.F.M., some of the finest literature that I have read.

Munsey Publications, in reprinting the gems of fantasy fiction, afforded to thousands untold pleasure and enjoyment. F.F.M. before it was sold, was fast insuring its reputation of the finest Fantasy magazine published.

Although I am truly sorry that the Munsey republications have been discontinued, I admit, that under the new leadership, quality is still being stressed. "Ark of Fire" was a grand story, which, I do admit, proves that F.F.M. will continue to give quality plus.

Another matter: not knowing the facts, I may be doing you an injustice, but it seems you are playing a dirty trick on f-f lovers by printing F.F.M. quarterly. The least you could do is to publish bi-monthly, for even though many readers, as I, would like the Munsey classics to be continued, we will get the highest quality stories from such authors as Hawkins, Taine, and others whom we shall find in these pages in the coming year, and we will want more of them.

If, as you say, you now have the fantastic lore of the whole world from which to choose, why is that you are now printing F.F.M. on a quarterly basis? After all, you yourselves spoke of "fantastic lore of the world," you know. . . .

The "Readers' Viewpoint" is a valuable asset and should continually be developed. I have noticed that nearly every single letter printed in it have been full of praise. F.F.M. has deserved this, and by the looks of things, it will continue to deserve the praise of its readers.

Before I forget, enclosed you will find a dollar and twenty-five cents for a year's subscription and a set of the new Virgil Finlay Portfolio illustrations.

GEORGE VELLIOTES.
1029 E. GUTIERREZ ST.,
SANTA BARBARA, CALIF.

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MOTORISTS Wanted!
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SAYMAN SALVE

FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

WANTS A NEW TITLE

For many years now I have been a consistent fan of various sf magazines and for all those years I have been silent as far as "reader viewpoint" departments are concerned.

So I am breaking quite a precedent in writing to you. The immediate cause of my surge from torpor is the suggestion by Fan W. A. Carrithers in your December issue that a more appropriate title than "F.F.M." is in order. He suggested, "Classics of Fantasy." I heartily approve his recommendation and his selection for a title.

May I also congratulate your editors on the September issue? It is quite up to the high standard that F.F.M. has maintained.

Fantastically yours,
WO HALLMAN.

316 NOB HILL AVE.,
SEATTLE, WASH.

WANTS INFORMATION

I've just finished reading your latest opus "Three Go Back" by Mitchell, which I enjoyed very much despite the fact that it adhered very closely to common pattern of all that type of story. Don't get me wrong. I like stories with paleontological themes. They are the only stories that are based upon real science—rather than pure imagination or prophetic futilities.

However, I think Mitchell idealized his cavemen far more than scientific research can bear. Your new policy robs us of many of the old Munsey classics, but on the other hand it promises us a new field equally splendid. There are a few of the Munsey stories which I'd like to get or trade from fans. I'd like to get the two Polaris novels left, Farley's remaining Radio stories, inner world stuff and his "Caves of Ocean," and Merritt's "Woman of the Wood."

I do wish other readers would write in about fantasy novels, since I am always trying to add to my library.

Could any of your readers inform me whether there was ever a sequel written to the story "Warlord of Venus" which appeared in 1930 in *Wonder Tales* or whether "Margo the Mighty" was ever printed in a book. I'd like to secure this latter story in any form.

Many of your readers will be sorry to hear of the death of Abraham Merritt, one of the fantasy authors of modern times whose works are worth reading.

I'll wind it up with the sincere wish that your magazine will go back to a monthly status.

JAMES DALEY.

34 CORBET ST.,
DORCHESTER, MASS.

THE NAVY REPORTS

My scoring on the Dec. issue:

1. "Three Go Back"—tops! Time story, well done—could have had a more logical explana-

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tion of the "slip in the time-spirals," but this is a minor point. More of Mitchell, please.

2. "King of the Gray Spaces"—fair.

3. and 4. "The Mask" and "The Derelict" These stories were not so hot. Maybe it is because I don't like short stories.

To heck with trimmed edges, glossy paper, etc. Give us more novels and classics, and, puh-leeze! GO MONTHLY!! Add more Merritt, E. R. Burroughs, Binder, etc.

GROVER HUGHES.

HELP

I need a few copies of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries,* all issues of *Fantastic Novels,* and a few others.

Can any of the readers help me?

EDWIN R. LOVING.

637 BLACKHAWK ST.,
WESTON, MISSOURI.

HELP OFFERED

I have plenty of back issues of F.F.M., F.N., *Amazing Stories, Argosy,* and books by E. R. Burroughs and H. G. Wells.

G. L. ROBERTS, JR.

FAIRFIELD, N. C.

LAWRENCE OKAY

I'm so happy you're obtaining the work of William Hope Hodgson for the pages of F.F.M. I'm looking forward to every story. I'm sorry to hear about the unavailability of the artists Finlay and Paul at the present time due to their being in the service of the country, but at the same time I think you have a very hopeful discovery in the new illustrator, Lawrence. I liked his first pictures.

Best regards to you (and F.F.M.!)

PFC. LARRY B. FARSACI.

DEC. ISSUE GOOD

I have read F.F.M. for a rather long time, not as long as some who can remember the stories of 1918, but I have read a few old ones.

I have just completed the Dec. issue of F.F.M. and have a few ideas of my own to express. First of all, will all those fans who constantly complain about having F.F.M. a monthly instead of a quarterly remember that Uncle Sam needs paper? Sure, I'd like a lot of my favorite mags coming back every month too, but right now I think and I know you'll all agree it's more important that our fighting men and women get all the paper and paper materials they need.

The Dec. issue of F.F.M. was good, but not exceptional, this of course is my own opinion. "Three Go Back" was good and in some places brilliant, but all and all not too outstanding.

"The Derelict" was good, and I liked the way at the end the author left you to form your own conclusion regarding what the mold was.

"The Mask" was not as good as other of the

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462 Niagara Street, Buffalo, New York

FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

"King in Yellow" stories which I have read.

"King of the Gray Spaces" I liked, as stories of future civilization always appeal to me.

After thinking it over don't you think the ending to "Three Go Back" should have been changed? It might have been more original if our hero and heroine would have perished back in the past or were transported back to the future to some year from whence they came, making for the possibility of a sequel.

Now I am really going to roll up my sleeves and really pitch in and complain, for here is something to which I have given considerable thought. . . . In many of the "Letters To The Editors" some story or book is mentioned that will not come out in F.F.M. or any of my other favorite magazines. Well, how about mentioning where one *can obtain a copy of these stories!* As an example of this—in the Dec. issue of F.F.M. a reader mentioned a new Lovecraft Omnibus called "Beyond The Wall Of Sleep" published by Arkham House. Could I obtain the address? Also where can one obtain a copy of "The King in Yellow"?

I will be happy to correspond with any fan having s.f. or any form of weird novels (books only). Also I would like to subscribe to any fan-mags that write me.

LUCK!!

CALVIN JACK WITT.
3808 W. LAWRENCE AVE.,
CHICAGO, 25, ILL.

Editor's Note: We cannot advertise books for sale, but you will doubtless find many friends in fantasy who will discuss your favorite stories with you.

MARCH ISSUE WONDERFUL

I want to thank you for the wonderful issue of the F.F.M. and so glad that you finished the "Infinite" serial.

Am an old *Argosy* fan since 1900. Could not keep all of the old copies and was glad when the fantasy stories were reprinted. Have every copy of both F.F.M. and F.N.

Have read lots of magazines, but don't care for anything much now but Fantasy stories. I can see that you are going to provide us with many fine stories under your new policy.

Wishing you all the success in the coming years, I remain, your faithful reader.

MRS. KATE L. BAETJE.
13 N. FRANKLIN ST.,
MOBILE, ALA.

RARE ISSUES NEEDED

Have been a fan of fantastic fiction for about twenty years, starting in at the age of about fifteen. Have read *Argosy* for years and started to read your magazine about 1939. Haven't got all the issues but those I have I consider priceless and wouldn't part with them for anything.

This is the one and only letter I have ever written to an editor, but your publishing house is exceptional, as you give us so much for our money. We still are in debt to you after payment!

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THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

I am on my second subscription (given me on my birthday by my wife whom I converted to your magazine) and I also have the first Finlay Portfolio. I have framed these prints and all eight hang in my living room causing a great deal of comment (all favorable) by my friends.

I would like readers to communicate with me, and I offer my twenty years of reading fantastic fiction to anyone who wishes information. It is possible I can help someone who is seeking information on some story.

If anyone has books or magazines of fantasy available, I shall be eager to know, especially if someone has a copy of A. Merritt's "Moon Pool" they would be willing to part with.

In my opinion Finlay is the master artist. Master authors are A. Merritt, Francis Stevens, Austin Hall, Tod Robbins. How about Bram Stoker, J. S. Lefanu, Sax Rohmer? Some of Lefanu's stuff is very fantastic and chilling.

Yours in Fantasy,
JOHN J. HOUSE.

437 MARSHALL AVE., APT. A,
ST. PAUL, MINN.

MESSAGE TO FANS

I have a file or F.F.M and F.N. from Sept.-Oct. '39 to Jan. '41 complete plus April and August '41. Are you missing copies, fans?

Shall be glad to hear from fantasy lovers, and shall answer all letters.

G. O. WINSTON, JR.

3434 34TH ST., N. W.
WASHINGTON, D. C.

SOLDIER REPORTS

Your magazine has been my favorite since it first came out in 1939. Just got the first issue put out by Popular Publications. The little item about no more reprints has put a deep furrow in my forehead.

If the magazine can keep its high standards without support from Munsey's "library of reprints" I shall continue to buy and enjoy F.F.M.

Whatever happens, good luck, and do what you can.

A loyal reader,
BEN RUMSEY.

"ARK" HITS SPOT

Have just finished "The Ark of Fire." Boy that really hit the spot! Too bad you can't reprint any more of the old *Argosy* classics.

As a suggestion, why don't you reprint "The Maracot Deep" by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle? This story takes half of a book and would fit in nicely with another short novel.

Keep up the good work!

ALPHONSE RAKIEC.

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Please place this in your "Reader's Page". I would like to obtain from a reader of F.F.M., the 1st Finlay portfolio. Is there anyone who has one of these in good condition? Please write to me.

JOHN SCHOMBURG, JR.
41 GEORGE ST.,
PEARL RIVER, N. Y.

F.F.M. MORE OFTEN!

I have just finished reading "The Ark of Fire" and it is undoubtedly one of the finest stories to be published by F.F.M. Now to get to my main question which is probably the forerunner of many other letters—when will you publish F.F.M. more frequently? We fans had a long, hard fight to make it a monthly and now it has retrogressed to a quarterly position.

F.F.M. is the best magazine on the newsstands today. I read seven different S-F magazines regularly with other kinds of magazines occasionally, and I can do without all of them in a pinch except yours. It represents the tops in quality.

The author of "The Ark of Fire" forgot to bring out one point. Even though the Earth was being purged of its dissident elements, it still had to deal with those in the Ark. The ones selected were to be of the best, but all the bad characters could not be wiped out. It would practically be impossible.

Please make F.F.M. at least a bi-monthly:

ARA MESROBIAN.
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CHEVY CHASE, MD.

PRAISE FOR BOK AND MOORE

I pause to write you this note in appreciation of the superb artistry of Hannes Bok in his frontispiece for "The Yellow Sign."

When I first noticed the picture I saw the grotesque figure and the unique trees in the background. Later when I looked at it again, taking in the detail and texture—suddenly in the upper right hand portion I no longer saw eerie trees—but a masculine face!

I felt that the picture would be incomplete without another face and soon I found opposite the man a feminine countenance.

Now I no longer see the odd trees but, rather, two striking human faces and an unearthly centerpiece in the background.

Here you have one of the cleverest drawings I was ever privileged to see and one that is completely out of this world.

ROSCO L. WRIGHT.
R. R. 1, BOX 175,
TOLEDO, OREGON.

P.S. C. L. Moore's story "Doorway into Time" was the best in the issue and, to the best of my knowledge, the best short story you *ever* published.

F.F.M. STILL TOPS

Just a few lines to let you know that I

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THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

thoroughly enjoyed "The Iron Star." If you keep giving us stories like this I will be satisfied. How about giving us monthly publication? I know the paper pulp shortage is serious but think of us fans waiting three months for a copy of F.F.M. Keep up the good work, F.F.M. is still tops in the field.

EDWARD WOOD.

3454 N. KILBOURN AVE.,
CHICAGO, ILL.

P.S. Leave out the new stories.

"IRON STAR" GREAT

Only four editions this year! What's the matter? That's quite a cut from twelve a year. But I didn't write this letter as a complaint.

After reading the September issue of F.F.M., I'm glad to say that you haven't let me down on the quality of the old mag. The "Iron Star" is a great adventure fantasy. Although there wasn't much pure fantasy, it still upheld the standards of previous editions.

Virgil Finlay's September cover is one of the best yet.

"Doorway Into Time" by Miss Moore is something different in the way of plots, to me. The one thing that seemed to slow the story down were the long passages without conversation. Who illustrated the tale? The style is new to me, in a way like Finlay's.

"Dwellers in the Mirage," the verse, is not bad.

"The Yellow Sign" didn't appeal to me as did "Demoiselle d'Ys" Do reprint more selections in the Chambers collection. Your illustrations for "Yellow Sign" were above the average.

The March cover was another superb job.

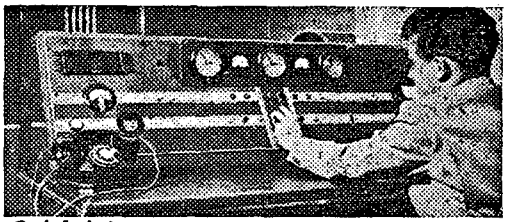
"Into the Infinite" in the March issue, ended in a fine way. Although some readers disliked it, I consider it a great classic.

When I first discovered F.F.M. on the newsstands late in 1940, I didn't realize what a find had been made. The edition contained "The Face in the Abyss." I haven't missed a single issue since then. In fact, I have amassed a practically complete collection of F.F.M. and its companion, *Fantastic Novels*.

Next week I go to college. If possible, your mag shall continue to be bought by me.

BOBBY GORDAN.

ALEXANDER ST.,
BUFORD, GEORGIA.



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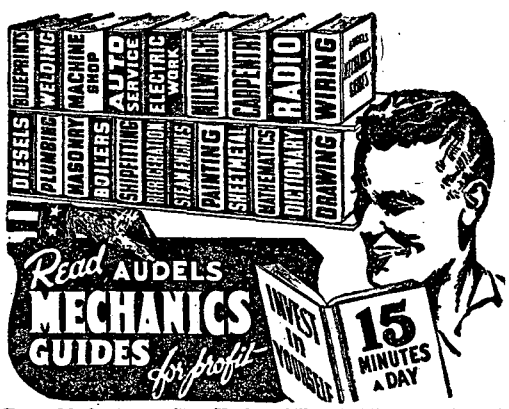

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FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

While still an excellent issue, the December number of the fantasy magazine elite was quite the poorest of the three issues of this year. I repeat, the issue was excellent, and the fact that it was not up to standard accents the merit of the succeeding two.

I fear that the novels in F.F.M. are evolving into the mystery-adventure type of fantasy story, witness your announcement of the detective yarn, "The Man Who Was Thursday," coming in the next issue. I would like to request that you steer clear of this type of story, for after all, devotees of fantastic literature prefer either straight science-fiction of spine chilling fantasy—detective magazines are flooding the market. If you *must* run something like this occasionally, get something from Sax Rohmer.

"Three Go Back" was a fine story, but not, to my mind, F.F.M.'s type. It had much of the flavor of a Burroughs story, except that ERB would tend to make it more melodramatic, and I enjoyed every line of it. On my rating scale of 0 to 5, I gave it 4 units, designating it as a minor classic.

"The Derelict" was good—I gave it 3 units—but there was something about it that lessened its entertainment value for me. Don't ask me what it was, for I can't explain. Bok's work was very mediocre.

"The Mask" was a nice little story, with beautiful illustrations, but I believe that I prefer "The Yellow Sign" and "Demoiselle d'Ys."

Bradbury has written a number of better stories than KOTGS, but this one was interesting and—well, human. Lawrence excellent.

Cover was good, but it certainly lacked the Finlayesque touch that has distinguished F.F.M.'s jacket in the past. However, it was by far Lawrence's best painting.

The interior pics average 3.75, not nearly so good as they have been in the past. The entire issue averages only 3.375, far below its usually high level.

It is rather ironic that so many letters were published this issue asking for another novel by A. Merritt. That very excellent author's untimely death on August 21 probably dashes to the ground all hopes of such a story. It is a well-known fact that he was working on a number of novels, so might it not be possible that he left a completed one? After all, Weinbaum left "The New Adam," one of the finest pieces of literature I've ever read. Agree? But whether we ever see another novel from the magic pen of this greatest of all fantasy authors, all of us owe him a debt of gratitude for the many excellent stories he has given us in the past. Of one thing I am certain—Abe Merritt will not be soon forgotten.

With best wishes for a Happy New Year to my favorite magazine, I remain,

Scientifictionally yours,

GENE HUNTER.

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HOW JOE'S BODY BROUGHT HIM FAME INSTEAD OF SHAME

HEY! QUIT KICKING THAT SAND IN OUR FACES!
THAT MAN IS THE WORST NUISANCE ON THE BEACH
LISTEN HERE, I'D SMASH YOUR FACE··· ONLY YOU'RE SO SKINNY YOU MIGHT DRY UP AND BLOW AWAY.
THE BIG BULLY! I'LL GET EVEN SOME DAY
OH DON'T LET IT BOTHER YOU, LITTLE BOY!
DARN IT! I'M SICK AND TIRED OF BEING A SCARECROW! CHARLES ATLAS SAYS HE CAN GIVE ME A REAL BODY. ALL RIGHT! I'LL GAMBLE A STAMP AND GET HIS FREE BOOK!
BOY! IT DIDN'T TAKE ATLAS LONG TO DO THIS FOR ME! WHAT MUSCLES! THAT BULLY WON'T SHOVE ME AROUND AGAIN!
LATER
WHAT! YOU HERE AGAIN? HERE'S SOMETHING I OWE YOU!
OH, JOE! YOU ARE A REAL MAN AFTER ALL!
HERO OF THE BEACH
GOSH! WHAT A BUILD
HE'S ALREADY FAMOUS FOR IT!

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Charles Atlas

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I want the proof that your system of *"Dynamic Tension"* will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscular development. Send me your free book, *"Everlasting Health and Strength."*

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